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MAURICE·MAETERLINCK

A·CRITICAL·STUDY·BY

UNA·TAYLOR

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MAURICE MAETERLINCK

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

HENNA TAYLOR

LONDON
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PREFATORY NOTE

No critical analysis of the works of one of the most elusive of contemporary authors can leave unrecognised the excellence of the English translations of Maurice Maeterlinck's writings by Mr. Alfred Sutro and Mr. A. Teixeira de Mattos—an excellence which none but those conversant with the difficulties they have surmounted can fully appreciate.

To Mr. Sutro in especial my personal thanks are due for his help and kindness.

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I

LYRICS

SOME twenty or more years ago, in 1889, Maurice Maeterlinck entered upon his public literary career with the small volume of lyrics entitled *Serres Chaudes* and the drama of *La Princesse Maleine*, to be followed by some fifteen plays and dramatic scenes. *Le Trésor des Humbles*, appearing in 1896, in like manner preluded the series of volumes which comprise, up to the present day, the sum total of his philosophical treatises, ethical essays, and other prose writings. Poet-dramatist and transcendental essayist, Maeterlinck has elected to present his art and his thought in the two distinct forms dictated by the trend of his literary genius. But if it is inevitable that a critical appreciation of his works should deal separately with these diverse modes of expression, it is also necessary to bear in mind that the poet-dramatist never ceases to be a philosophic moralist, that the transcendental essayist never ceases to be a poet.

It was in the fitness of things that Maeterlinck's first drama, *La Princesse Maleine*, should see the light almost simultaneously with the series of lyric poems entitled *Serres Chaudes*. Later years have added little to their number—the edition of 1890 contains but thirty-three poems in all—yet in the closely woven web of the poet's æsthetic individuality they indicate, as the bending reeds the river's current, the drift of mood and emotion destined to dominate the earlier phases of his art.

So far as the impulse of sentiment is concerned, their paramount inspiration would seem to be drawn from the besetting spiritual maladies of human existence, in its phase of despondent, enervated mournfulness. They may stand for the lyric utterance of the temper of mind and spirit induced by the sense of apathetic lassitude and a hopeless acquiescence in the irremediable workings of adverse fate :—

> Mon âme est pâle d'impuissance
> Et de blanches inactions.

Poem follows poem, the outcome of a melancholy as vaguely sterile as it is incurable; of a grief as drowsy, void, and stifled as that of Coleridge's "Dejection." From the first stanzas to the close of the last page, the poet's

imagination dwells in a vision-world of symbolic hallucination, tinged and dyed with the iridescent colours, the dim translucencies, of dream-dusks, of veiled dawns and sultry noons. The sequence attains its unbroken unity of impression, visual and pictorial, spiritual and imaginative, bathed, saturated in a vaporous atmosphere where the strings of sensation are muted, where the pulses of life are numbed, its fevers outworn; where the vital tide is ever receding from its shores and passion itself has fallen into the languor of a mortal swoon.

Picture after picture rises. A hot-house in the heart of a forest; exotic vegetations spring and flourish beneath the damp and misted glass, even as sins, sicknesses, and distresses are nourished within the opaque enclosure of that ultimate resort of human personality we name the soul. We see filmy cupolas under whose tinted domes narcotic blossoms spread their petals to the moon; we watch windless waters; marshes where swans hatch a raven brood; plains where grey flocks browse the waste grass; phantasmal figures of wax in a summer forest; apparitions of princesses dying in fields of hemlock. The scenes shift. Irrelevant, unconnected mirages of bewildering panoramas succeed one to another

like the slides of the showman's magic-lantern :—

On dirait une femme évanouie un jour de moisson,
Il y a des postillons dans la cour de l'hospice ;
(Oh, rien n'y est à sa place.)
. . . . . .
Un navire de guerre à pleines voiles sur un canal,
Des oiseaux de nuit sur des lys,
Un glas vers midi,
Là-bas sous ces cloches. . . .

But while the scenes, the symbol-shapes change their masked semblances, the same note is sustained throughout. The sense of stagnation, inertia, impotence, pervades every stanza :—

Végétation de symboles,
Nénufars mornes des plaisirs,
Palmes lentes de mes désirs,
Mousses froides, lianes molles.
. . . .
Toujours la pluie à l'horizon.
Toujours la neige sur les grèves. . . .

sentence after sentence accentuates the impression of dolorous quiescence. Passion here holds no sway ; where there is nothing the king has lost his rights. The exhausted hounds of desire pursue a lost scent ; the quarry, falsehood's white hind, has fled into the trackless

night. Anger and hate, stricken beasts of prey, languish, crouched motionless under a motionless moon in whose ashen light nothing save shadows comes to birth. The *maladive* infection of strangling creepers spreads poison, the spiritual waters are tainted which encompass the white blossom of the soul whose mystic petition ascends to the blue vault above :—

Seul, un lys érige d'entre eux,
Pâle et rigidement débile,
Son ascension immobile
Sur les feuillages douloureux.

Et dans les lueurs qu'il épanche
Comme une lune, peu à peu,
Elève vers le cristal bleu,
Sa mystique prière blanche.

The circle of sadness, of the lethargy of sadness, is complete. Everywhere sadness prevails, and if there may be occasionally a cessation of grief, there is no least possibility of joy : "Toujours les mêmes heures sonnent." Expectancy scarcely lifts its eyes, awaiting only the night which has no morrow. The sense of silence is insistent, the impression of remoteness absolute. Man is for ever the diver imprisoned within his bell :—"O plongeur à jamais sous sa cloche."

Between the soul and the universe, wherein the soul has her being, there rises eternally the semi-transparency of that crystal dome. In that irremediable isolation, wrapped in a slumberous fever, the soul stirs in her sleep, and with beseeching hands sends forth her muffled cry to God :—

> Je meurs sous votre rancune.
> Seigneur, ayez pitié, Seigneur,—

and in her dreams, with half-drawn breath, she formulates her prayer :—

> Vous savez, Seigneur, ma misère.
> Voyez ce que je vous apporte :
> Des fleurs mauvaises de la terre,
> Et du soleil sur une morte.
>
> Voyez aussi ma lassitude,
> La lune éteinte et l'aube noire ;
> Et fécondez ma solitude
> En l'arrosant de votre gloire.

But prayer dies, as withered flowers in a vase, and the procession of spectral visions resumes its march.

No footfall of all the footfalls that pass without ; no voice of all the voices that sound in the world of men, penetrate that silence ; it is the silence of a mortuary. The faces that people the blankness are but reflections of a

funeral masquerade of shadows, seen as in that glass of which the text inscribed upon the first page speaks: "And in his hand a glass that shows us many more." The poet has severed his sadness from the sadnesses of his fellows; he has even severed it from all the accidents, the occasions and stimulants to sadness, that belong to the exterior life of humankind. It is in truth the essential subjectivity of lyricism carried to the verge of the possible. The circle of the self-soul is the horizon-line, and there is nothing to tell of what outer circumstances have fashioned and wrought this nameless mournfulness within those spiritual precincts. "Ich habe ein Recht müde zu sein," Heine said, and indited his last "Lazarus" poems, the bitterest in their ironic emotionalism ever penned by a dying hand. But the heavy finger of physical anguish; the life-long resentment of a heart's betrayal; the innate revolt of the death-sick Jew against the world of Nazarenes are ever present factors in his lyric confessional. Musset in his "Nuits," in his incomparable "Tristesse," enumerates and specifies his losses; his tears fall for youth which is departed, for joys which are vanished, for hopes which lie in the dust, for past friendships, for past passions. Edgar Allan Poe, even in his moods of profoundest

introspection, never wholly detaches his misery from the miseries of other actors and agents in the "tragedy man." In *Serres Chaudes* grief has no cause, the wound has no sword. All is silence, a blank, nothingness. Sorrow has no source as it has no anodyne. Two actualities only emerge from the hazy transparencies, the shifting semblances, the symbolic phantasmagoria of dream-shapes—the Soul and God.

The means whereby the æsthetic atmosphere is created and maintained are not far to seek. Master of the resources of his art, Maeterlinck has utilised his gift of language to the full in the achievement of perfect concord between the emotional sentiment and the sound-form of his verse. The scale of the words employed is singularly limited, but he possesses a supersensitive ear. His appreciation of the gradations of significance imparted to one and the same word by its position and rhythmical emphasis in the construction of the phrase is unrivalled. Hence no sense of repetition, reiteration or recurrence obtrudes itself upon the reader's consciousness. The limitation of his vocabulary maintains the intentional monotony of effect, while the predominant use of laggard vowel-sounds in many of the stanzas gives an additional note of languid obsession to the melody of the verse. Few poets have

welded together more intimately the emotional sense with the rhythmical cadence, the *drag* in such lines as :—

> Moi, j'attends un peu de réveil,
> Moi, j'attends que le sommeil passe,
> Moi, j'attends un peu de soleil . . .
> Sur mes mains que la lune glace.

the repetitions in :—

> Mon âme en est triste à la fin ;
> Elle est triste enfin d'être lasse,
> Elle est lasse enfin d'être en vain,
> Elle est triste et lasse à la fin . . .

(examples of his rigid economy of words can be multiplied) convey to the full, apart from the literal meaning of the words, the vocal suggestion of the indolent disquietude that pervades the soul's long trance of shadows.

Colour itself is used as an emotional cipher. The colour epithets : "Les songes lilacs," "Les lys jaunes des lendemains," "L'ennui bleu dans le cœur," "Les serpents violets des rêves," "Les tiges rouges des haines," "Les deuils verts de l'amour," are colour-abbreviations for the lengthier metaphors of sentimental meanings.

And finally if the appeal to the ear reinforces the emotional effect, the pictorialism of the poet's method (and there are few lines

which do not conjure up a visualised conception) is never allowed to carry the mind's eye beyond the bounds of strictly allegorical suggestion. Analysed, it is a pictorialism rather apparent than real. Pictorialism such as that of Rossetti's or William Morris's early poems, descriptive or narrative in purpose, has no place in Maeterlinck's art.

In Morris's lines :—

> There she stands and her yellow hair slantingly
> Drifts the same way that the rain goes by—

the picture exists for its own sake, drawn by a hand to which colour, line, movement, are ends in themselves; it is a picture illustrative, not representative, of the text and theme of the poetic thought it incorporates. The pictorial images of *Serres Chaudes* do not exist for themselves; they are neither descriptive nor narrative; they are merely the outcome of a continuously symbolic exposition of thought and feeling, and the symbol-shape, human or vegetable, is no more than the exhalation emanating from those thoughts and feelings, cast and coloured in a transitive mould borrowed from the semblance of things seen :—

> Sous l'ennui morne des roseaux,
> Seuls les reflets profonds des choses,
> Des lys, des palmes et des roses,
> Pleurent encore au fond des eaux.

II

DRAMA

To pass from the lyrics of *Serres Chaudes* to the drama of *La Princesse Maleine;* from *La Princesse Maleine* to the groups of Death and Love dramas—*Les Aveugles*, 1890, *L'Intruse*, 1890, *Intérieur*, 1892, *La Mort de Tintagiles*, 1894, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, 1892, *Alladine et Palomides*, 1892, *Aglavaine et Selysette*, 1896—again, to pass from these to the later plays, is to follow the development of Maeterlinck's outlook on life signalised definitely in the ethical essays. Nor is it possible, here or elsewhere, to discuss the art of the playwright apart from the consideration of his moral transcendentalism and of the ideas which would seem to fashion the pattern and web of the special formula in which he has clothed his conceptions.

"There are ideal sequences of events which run on parallel planes with the real ones—Il y a une série d'événements idéaux parallèles

à la réalité . . . ils coincident rarement "—Novalis's doctrine is a succinct statement of the point of view common to those, like the German mystic, who detect in the daily annals of humanity the stage of the great morality play of spiritual life. Teutonic mystics old and new, genuine and spurious, have one and all recognised and in some fashion attempted to define, negatively or affirmatively, that trinity of personality implied in the terms body, sense-soul, and spirit-soul. "There is in the soul something which is above the soul," Eckhart affirms. And the conception of this "bi-parte" soul is in conformity with the philosophy Maeterlinck's essays illuminate. In this conception, further, lies the rational source of much which at first sight appears paradoxical and contradictory in his dramatic delineation of life and character.

For, while the lives of the body, the sense-soul, and the spirit-soul are lived simultaneously—are lived, as Novalis expresses the conditions of existence, "on parallel planes"—the three thus intimately affiliated are not fused one with another. The events that befall them occur in different spheres, the histories of each are always separable and sometimes incongruous. What is true of all as a corporate unity may be false of either or any

as self-subsistent. At times a correspondence in will and sympathy may harmonise the constituent elements and induce a transitory unison. Oftener it happens that the two more sympathetic members of the triumvirate go their way as allies, severed from the divinely illuminated inner principle. Dissociated from its controlling influence, rebels against the authority of that serene indweller of the last fortress of self, sense-soul and body fall a prey to every catastrophe of chance; fall captive to the untoward calamities which lie in ambuscade for the unwary adventurer upon the high-road of fate.

The persistent vision and presentment of this super-plane of mortal being and of the multiple lives of the various complexes that go to build up the individual man, gives to Maeterlinck's genius its most distinctive dramatic inspiration. The cross-currents that filter from plane to plane, the discords that result from interchanging impulses, the actions that betray the contradiction between what we are and what we would be, between the self on the lower plane and its fellow upon the super-plane, the dislocations of the soul who says "I go" and the body that goes not, these form the ground-themes of dramas where love contends with wisdom, where man

and woman succumb, victims to the impersonal force embodied in outward circumstances—a force, as here conceived of, hostile to joy, hostile to human peace—"la destinée extérieure."

La Princesse Maleine exhibits, with an echo of Elizabethan stage methods, the workings of that fatality in its most sinister aspect. The menace of destiny broods over every scene of the romance-drama, a grim and complicated version of the True-Bride stories dear to *Volksmärchen.* Peasant tradition, it is true, conducted its stories to a far different sequel. The False Bride of village *conte* is invariably at long last dispossessed of her bridegroom. The True Bride, be she Yungfrau Maleen, or the Princess of the Soaring Lark, or the maiden who loved the Drummer Lad, or she, most notably, whose wardrobe comprised the three robes of fairy fame—the robe woven with golden suns, the robe strewn with silver moons, and that last of surpassing loveliness, the robe of shining starlight—invariably retrieves, after much labour and many distressful rebuffs, the crown, the Prince, and the Prince's heart. Irrationally secure in the optimistic confidence that fortune proves in the end faithful, the Märchen-makers went on their way. Their creed, the happy belief of the poor in earthly

goods that the future will pay all arrears of joy to the Luck-child, is a birth-mark of the genuine folk-tale.

It is a faith the poet-dramatist of *Maleine* in no wise shared. From the first scene to the last, the terror of fate holds imagination hostage; terror is the all-pervading atmosphere. —" La Princesse Maleine aura peur de l'avenir!" says one of the guard of honour who stands sentinel outside the castle. And from the betrothal feast which gives the little Princess, with her wax-white face and pale eyelashes, to her bridegroom, while stars and moon and the black heaven portend disaster to come, the characters of the play breathe, move, and speak as in a cloud of terror, until, with horror piled upon horror, crime piled upon crime, the curtain falls and the lights are extinguished.

The tragedies of blood in Elizabethan drama left nothing to be invented in grim sensation so far as the nature of their episodes was concerned, and the translation of " Macbeth "[1] and of the deepest-dyed of John Ford's tragedies of sin and slaughter,[2] no less than Maeterlinck's study of " King Lear," " la pièce architype du théâtre humain," are conclusive evidence of

[1] *La tragédie de Macbeth.* Traduction nouvelle.

[2] *Annabella* (" 'Tis pity she's a Whore "), drame en 5 actes de J. Ford, traduit et adapté par Maurice Maeterlinck. Paris, 1895.

the rare extent to which Maeterlinck made himself conversant with the spirit embodied in the dramatic art of the Shakespearian epoch. But he has known how to impart an individual and specific quality to the scenes of horror he elected to delineate.

There exist wide, if not clearly definable, distinctions between the manifold forms of fear, corporal and psychical, which beset the path of humankind and lend to life cypress-shadows deeper, it may be, than any cast by the actual calamities fears anticipate. The terror resulting from a shock to the senses, communicated by sight, hearing, or touch, is of one nature; the terror, insidious and paralysing in its effects, engendered by the morbid excitement of super-sensitive nerves, is of a wholly different species. The Terrorists of modern literature have worked both mines in their search for sensational situation. They have appealed to the instincts of physical recoil, to the instincts of emotional and spiritual repulsion, and to the revulsion of the intuitive impulses of sanity confronted by the disquieting portrayal of the abnormal and the super-normal, moral or mental.

For the Elizabethan, terror was a simpler thing. The terrors of life supernatural, the terrors of material violences and cruelties

lacked, to some measure, the imaginative impressiveness more recent writers have known how to impart to them. Violence, cruelty, in elder days were more or less a part of the surroundings, part and parcel of the conditions, the heritage, medievalism bequeathed to common existence. Supernatural fears no less were of too common experience to evoke that glamour of dread which demands that its object should not be too accurately outlined. The acute quality which the unusual, the unfamiliar, lends to the presentment of ideas or facts was wanting. Accepted facts, familiar ideas are not, outside the nursery, favourable to an atmosphere such as that Maeterlinck in *Maleine*, and, in a somewhat different fashion, in *La Mort de Tintagiles*, triumphantly conjures up. The ghost scene in "Hamlet," the banquet scene in "Macbeth," the scene of despair at the close of Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus," where the striking of the hours and half-hours, as they expire, brings Faustus nearer and nearer to the exactment of his dire compact, stand out, it is true, as exceptions. Yet, looked at closely, both in Hamlet's first dismay and in Macbeth's frenzied consternation, the appeal to the sense of fear is strenuously reinforced by other emotional stimulants. Upon the platform of the Elsinore castle the instinctive

recoil of the living from the non-living is almost immediately supplemented by another sentiment—the vehement desire of the son to fathom the mystery of the spectral apparition:—

> I'll call thee Hamlet,
> King, father, royal Dane : O answer me !

Macbeth, appalled at the spectacle of the phantom shape in the banqueting-hall of Forres palace, derives his dread far more from his own consciousness of guilt than from the phantasmal vision. Faustus's agonised expectancy, with its tinge of madness, resumes in itself the remorse and despair of a lost soul condemned to a medieval hell.

Poe's sentence—

> Much of madness, and more of sin,
> And horror, the *soul* of the plot—

applies with singular fitness to *La Princesse Maleine.* The sense of terror, the special quality of the terror, is not effected by the crude violences, the criminal passions, which serve for body to the play. Maeterlinck's terror is a ghost who walks invisible. His fear has the quality of the unseen, the uncertain, of that abstract and sombre power of which the shadow alone is perceptible. It is in truth "the soul of the plot." Without recourse to the supernatural of ordinary acceptation, he

has enveloped his characters, he has plunged the action of his play, into an atmosphere charged with the menace of the invisible, attaining, in the words of his preface to the collected edition of his dramatic works, " une certaine harmonie épouvantée et sombre."

Maleine herself is of the all-pitiful race of those child-women who, in the phrase of Novalis, are " des enfants qui ne sont pas des enfants." Maeterlinck has portrayed such more than once, and Maleine has for sister of her blood Mélisande, and, in less degree, both Alladine and gentle Selysette are of one kindred. In Maleine the type is at its initial stage. Her childhood (throughout the play her extreme youth is emphasised), has fallen prey to a passion, a sudden irresponsible obsession, of womanhood. The concentrated emotions of maturity prematurely grafted upon the fragile frame, have tainted the whole being of the little princess. She retains the frail dawn-delicacy of a typical Burne-Jones figure, the attenuated grace, the pathetic charm, but, as likewise in the artist's pictured faces, it is a delicacy without freshness, a charm blemished, a grace contaminated, by the unhealthfulness of desires too soon developed, of instincts too early ripened. She passes before our eyes like a child automaton,

possessed by an arbitrary idolatry, walking in a world of nightmare dreams, the human focus towards which all fears, all horrors converge.

Stars with trailing filaments:—"étoiles à longue chevelure annoncent la mort des princesses," shower from the black skies of her espousal night. Within the lighted windows of King Marcellus's royal banquet-hall the feast is spread where the aged King Hjalmar has brought young Hjalmar to wed the pale child Maleine. It is a revel of wine and drunken quarrel, men shout and fight within the walls amidst the glare of marriage torches. And from their post without upon the terrace the King's guards watch and wait the issue of the uproar. Then across the dusky garden the small figure of a trembling, weeping child flies from that fierce carousal. It is Maleine, panic-stricken, who escapes. Where will she fly? "Où court-elle?" the sentinel questions, "elle pleure." The small figure vanishes into the background, while surrounded by his attendants and guards the old drunken toper Hjalmar makes furious exit from the palace door. Let King Marcellus keep his daughter with her livid face and white lashes, Prince Hjalmar shall wed elsewhere, and soon all the ravens of Holland shall flock hither to a funeral feast.

Between the ferocities of the rival monarchs, between Hjalmar, foaming maledictions and Marcellus's outraged pride, Maleine's destiny shapes the undoing of a child passion-struck for her once-seen bridegroom. Does she love the girl-faced boy? Marcellus demands next day. Yes! Still does she love him? Yes! And still? Exasperated by the frightened monosyllables, Marcellus rages, but rages in vain. Princess Maleine will not renounce young Hjalmar, rather a prison in the dark tower—rather death itself, maybe. She does not reason; she has no words in which to speak of her passion, to utter that which is passing in her soul. She is a puppet in a dumb-show, a semi-conscious puppet in the grip of fate. . . .

The scene shifts. War has laid its red hand on the state of Harlingen. Town and palace smoulder to ashes. Marcellus is slain, the land is a land of unburied dead. Hjalmar has kept his oath and the ravens' feast is spread around the royal palace; and the Prince will wed the False Bride, Uglyane, the Princess from over the sea, with her scullion's soul and petty vanities. For in old Hjalmar's castle of Ysselmonde, Anne, her mother, rules all things to her liking.

But the True Bride, escaped from her in-

carceration in the dark tower, has likewise escaped from the scene of slaughter. With the inevitable nurse of renaissance *novelle* she strays, lost in the forest, seeking always—there is no truce to her obsession—the path to Ysselmonde and to the Prince. The wood is dark, and fear, like a shadow, walks ever at her side. It is long since she has seen the sunlight, for through the barred window of her prison cell no ray might pierce. Her face is waxen and blanched and starved. Her peasant cloak hides the gold fringe of her gown as she walks trembling amongst the tree-stems. Brutish, sinister figures of vagrant beggars haunt the forest paths. And in the dusk wood Maleine's voice echoes in " ces répétitions étonnées qui donnent aux personnages l'apparence de somnambules un peu sourds, constamment arrachés à un songe pénible." The vagabonds answer the nurse's interrogations. Are the King and Queen dead ?

PREMIER PAUVRE. Oui, je crois qu'ils sont morts.
MALEINE. Ils sont morts ?

Prince Hjalmar is to be wedded.

UN PAUVRE. Il va se marier."
MALEINE. Il va se marier ?

The nurse will take refuge with the hermit at the cross-roads of Judas.

UN PAUVRE. Ne criez pas ce nom dans l'obscurité !

and on that ominous word the scene closes.

The last acts pass at Ysselmonde. Maleine has reached the township of old Hjalmar's kingdom, with its gloomy castle, its windmill, its canal, its grey church, its cemetery. On one side stretch the vaporous marshes, on the other lies the fog-bound sea where great vessels, the sombre warships of the past, sail by. Inns it has also where the little Princess may lodge, where brutal peasants drink and fight, coarse, gross, and malignant, poisoned by the hot exhalations of noisome swamps and the chill mists of the autumn nights. Within the castle decrepitude steals on the hoary-headed King, frenzied by his adulterous passion for his evil guest, La Reine Anne. The atmosphere is charged with crimes passed and crimes to come, and shadows of sins lurk in every corner of the palace. There the False Bride, Uglyane, awaits her nuptials. There the Queen dogs the steps of the young Prince :—

LA REINE ANNE, mère d'Uglyane (to Prince Hjalmar). Vous êtes presque mon fils, et je vous aime comme une mère, peut-être plus qu'une mère.

There young Hjalmar suffers, in paralysed inaction, her caresses :—

PRINCE HJALMAR. J'ai peur de comprendre !

And from the burying-ground the *Dies iræ* echoes for ever through the castle windows.

The story follows its traditional course. Maleine becomes waiting-maid to Uglyane. By fraud, the pale automaton of passion, she steals, cloaked and hooded, the place of the False Bride at the tryst young Hjalmar has bidden Uglyane keep. It is night in the gardens of the castle by the fountain where the high trees grow. The Prince awaits his bride's coming. Will, he wonders, the silence of the place penetrate Uglyane's torpid vanity? Will she consent to renounce their marriage and avert the catastrophes that overhang their bridal? "Est-ce qu'elle aurait un peu de silence dans le cœur?"

The owls hoot, the willow leaves fall on his head from the autumn boughs. He throws a clod of earth to scare the birds, and the mould clings to his hand. . . . She is coming. Who? A hooded figure, a white face, eyes like clear water. Surely, surely, Uglyane is beautiful, never before did he look on her as now, never before see her thus:—

MALEINE. J'ai peur!

Let her come nearer, lean her face to the moon. And he kisses the lips that are shadowed.

MALEINE. J'ai peur !

Some one weeps there at hand. It is the fountain weeps in the wind, and the wind blows the drops upon their faces. " J'ai peur ! " reiterates the child-voice in the darkness. Some one watches with great eyes ! It is the owl, sitting in the branches, and Hjalmar again casts clods to scare him hence. " J'ai peur ! " The earth has fallen back upon her covered head. Fear ! a mole is tunnelling the ground beneath her feet. Fear ! Fear ! it comes through the shut gates, the high walls. . . .

HJALMAR. Uglyane, regardez-moi . . . à quoi songez vous ? . . .

MALEINE. Je songe à la Princesse Maleine.

Silence. She is thinking of Maleine, La Princesse Maleine. Then " I *am* La Princesse Maleine." Four times she repeats the words. But Maleine is dead, the Prince replies. No, I am she. Then how came she hither ?—" Je ne sais pas." Conviction breaks on the Prince.

HJALMAR. Maleine ! Maleine ! qu'allons nous faire ?

The fountain sobs, then suddenly is still.

TOUS DEUX. Oh !

MALEINE. Qu'est-ce qu'il y a, qu'est-ce qu'il y a maintenant ?

HJALMAR. Ne pleurez pas ; n'ayez pas peur. . . .

MALEINE. Qu'est-ce qui arrive ici ? Qu'est-ce qui va arriver ? Je veux m'en aller. Je veux m'en aller. . . .

But whether La Princesse Maleine, whether young Hjalmar go or stay, fate has entered the garden and with them she abides.

On the plane of "les événements idéaux," fate has decreed that Maleine must die. On the plane of real events Anne has set herself to compass the same end. Act III deepens the gloom of intrigue. The reason of the grey King is undermined. "I think death has begun to knock at my door," his loud voice breaks harshly upon the ear of the dancers in the hall. The music ceases, the dance is arrested. "On frappe à la petite porte." In white robe of betrothal the True Bride enters, and the old King swoons as the small white figure approaches. The net of death is closing round more than one victim.

Weakly pitiful, the King resists in vain the demands of Anne. Between the unwelcome revenant, between Maleine, who should have died amongst the slain at Harlingen, and the adulterous partner of his crimes, he must choose. Step by step he cedes to the stronger will. Maleine sickens. Outside the castle the members of the royal group talk with one

another, the Prince and Maleine, the little Allan, the Queen, the King. There is a strange pestilence in the town; there are many new graves in the earth, many dead in the burying-ground; the Fool blesses himself as one who signs the cross in the presence of death as he passes where with half-closed eyes the Princess sits. The sails of the windmill, the black mill, stop. Horror possesses the soul of the King. . . . Something dark traverses the cemetery:—

MALEINE. Il y a quelque chose de noir qui arrive ?

Whence? From the graveyard in the mist. It is only the seven Béguines; they come to spin for the wedding of Maleine. The third—what does she carry? Linen, linen for the wedding-sheet—"for you, Princess Maleine." The old King's horror grows. "Ce poison, mon Dieu, dans ce pauvre petit corps blanc!"

LE PETIT ALLAN. Pourquoi Ma-aleine ferme les yeux ? . . . Ou-ouvrez les yeux, Ma-aleine !

ANNE. Va jouer, va jouer. . . .

LE ROI. Il y a là un cyprès qui me fait des signes.

ANNE. Vous vous êtes endormi ? est-ce que vous rêvez? . . . mais faites attention à ce que vous dites ! Vous effrayez tout le monde !

The dialogue proceeds, charged to excess with the words which are not uttered. It proceeds in

broken sentences, like the sentences let fall in some half-stifled delirium. The evening darkens. Again "On frappe étrangement à la porte."

ANNE. On frappe ?

PRINCE HJALMAR. Qui est-ce qui frappe à cette heure ? . . . On n'ouvre plus. Révenez demain ! . . .

ANNE. Mais avec quoi frappe-t-il ? . . .

HJALMAR. Je vais voir (il ouvre la porte).

ANNE. Entrez !

MALEINE. J'ai froid !

HJALMAR. Il n'y a personne. . . .

The end approaches. Isolated within locked doors from every living being, from the Prince, from the nurse, from all human aid, the little Princess lies on her bed in the solitary chamber of the grim castle. The tempest rages without and the blaze of lightnings crimsons the darkness. Fear has closed her grip on the heart of the child. Fear of the dark, fear of the light, fear of the shadows, of sounds and of silences, of the living and the dead. "Mon Dieu, je crois que mon cœur va mourir !" Death, a death of hideous savage cruelty, waits in the corridor with the senile King and the evil Queen upon the threshold of the silent chamber.

In the murder scene which follows it is

inevitable perhaps that the appeal to effects of protracted physical violence should impair the impression, sustained up to that point, of an atmosphere exhaling the apprehension of the invisible, the impalpable, the unseen. Possibilities are infinite, actuality brings with it a boundary, and in the final outrage upon life, the life of a child, perpetrated by the two royal assassins, the scene loses something of the dramatist's peculiar touch, something of imaginative reticence, something of suggestive power; it becomes to a certain extent a reverberation of the old crude tragedies of blood.

Nor in the crowded antechamber of the chapel, where the Court awaits the coming of the King, does the sense of horror, of that horror which is of the soul, not the body, regain its force. The infection of fear has, it is true, spread from its centre and possesses every man and woman of the expectant throng. It has paralysed the brain of the King; Anne herself is stricken by it. It is a horror of storm and tempest; of the dismay of panic-stricken animals who crouch upon the tombs in the graveyard, of the portent of a moon's eclipse, of ominous birds, of howling dogs. It is fear exteriorised in all its forms and shapes, it is an orgy of fear. But the climax is too prolonged,

too long suspended with confused accumulation of detail. Moreover it lacks its first harrowing accent; for although the King raves out his confession of guilt and young Hjalmar sends the soul of the Queen to seek its own place, the small white figure of the child, in whose heart fear was focussed, is cold and still. The shut eyelids hide from our imagination the nightmare vision of those eyes, the vision they mirrored of the invisible. And over her sleep the chant of the seven Béguines rises and the storm without sinks and the nightingales resume their love-song, and in the dusk of the new day "On entend les rossignols au dehors. Un coq saute sur l'appui de la fenêtre et chante."

III

LOVE DRAMAS

THE dramas, dramatic scenes, and dialogues which from 1890 to 1896 followed on the publication of *La Princesse Maleine*, admit of two broad divisions. *Les Aveugles*, *L'Intruse*, 1890, *Intérieur*, 1892, *La Mort de Tintagiles*, 1894, are dramatic scenes where death and the reflection of death upon the glass life incessantly holds up to the invisible, constitute the central theme. The appeal in these, and most notably in *La Mort de Tintagiles*, is mainly to the nerves. *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Alladine et Palomides*, 1892, *Aglavaine et Selysette*, 1896, are romance dramas, where love, emotional rather than sensual, is the determining factor and the active agent. *Les Sept Princesses*, 1891, stands rather as a vaguely pictorial fantasy than as a drama of idea, emotion, or action.

The symbolic pictorialism of the *Serres Chaudes* is replaced in these dramas by a somewhat kindred method in dramatic presentment and dialogue.

For the mystic, from time immemorial, the symbol has served two distinct and converse purposes. It has been the language of the secret-keeper; it has also, and in modern days more frequently than of old, been the language of the secret-teller. As a veil of the tabernacle of divine mysteries it has been the tribute paid by religious reverence to the sanctuaries of thought. As an exposition, a disclosure, as the withdrawal of the veil, it has served as the only vocabulary available for the utterance of those mysteries, for the conveyance to human intelligence of truths, which are untranslatable into the speech of common usage. Revelation, or the attempt at revelation, has insistently clothed itself in apocalyptical allegory and metaphor.

Maeterlinck has employed the symbol with both intentions. In his lyrics pictorial symbolism is almost exclusively the method and medium of exposition; it is the hieroglyphic script of the ideas; it is the appeal to the understanding through the channel of imaginative vision; it is his formula for the disclosure of thoughts and sensations which elude expression in conventional idiom. In the dramas it serves other ends no less essential to his purpose. With regard to those things pertaining to the region of transcen-

dental vision, his imagery is, or would seem to be, a continued attempt to withdraw the screen, to raise the curtain, which holds the unseen realm of the spirit from view. But conversely, with regard to things tangible, visible, substantial, to what dogmatic materialism is pleased to denominate the real, Maeterlinck utilises the symbol as a mask.

Keeping in mind the original conception of a dual train of events—the "série d'événements idéaux paralléles à la réalité"—which it is never possible to dissociate wholly from his earlier works—he joins the company of the secret-tellers in so far as the symbol in his hands is the only possible language into which he can translate the unknown tongue of the "au delà." It is a cipher he employs, adequately or inadequately, to indicate facts and suggest occurrences passing upon spiritual planes, incapable of direct verbal transcription. On the other hand, he equally applies a symbolic process for the registration of occurrences that take place upon the earth-plane of action and passion; he invests the levels of human existence with a disguise; men wear the aspect of similitudes; their deeds and words are clothed with allegoric significance, they act in parables. The æsthetic outcome of the process is unity of tone. Under

the symbol actuality is transcendentalised into harmony with what is above actuality, reality figures as an emblematic representation; under the symbol things spiritual are incarnated, and the invisible takes shape until in a drifting mist the horizon-line between heaven and earth is obliterated, and the symbol which embodies the unseen things of the soul walks hand in hand with the symbol which dematerialises the things of sense. Further, an illusion of distance, of remoteness, is induced, a sense, to adopt Maeterlinck's own image, of the semi-opaqueness of misted glass, interposed between our sight and the workings of human existence :—

ARKEL. Je suis très vieux, et cependant je n'ai pas encore vu clair un instant en moi-même; comment voulez-vous que je juge ce que d'autres ont fait ?

This veiled, or rather masked, element in human life as in human relationships is insistently present. It is indeed an essential feature of all these dramas where the two great crises of life, love and death, constitute the leading motives; love and death, be it always understood, acting in subordination to that overruling force, Destiny, which borrows their shapes and wears their features. "Souvent," Novalis wrote, speaking of romance, "il

contient les événements d'une mascarade . . . un événement masqué entre personnes masquées." It is a felicitous definition of the peculiar impression produced by the Maeterlinck stage. Life in his plays is a symbol within a symbol. His characters stand in relation to actuality, not so much as types, but as counterfeit presentments of single individualities in whose somewhat blank personality a phase of emotion, for the hour, finds its vivid embodiment. His incidents, often violent to the brink of extravaganza, are but the incidents of a pageantry of shadows, and the pageant itself is no more than a framework within whose bounds emotions perform their mystery play. Episodes, incidents, the living human beings, of his stage, are alike mere threads upon whose tenuous mortal web passion's rosary is momentarily strung, while much of the dialogue is of the nature of that Maeterlinck analyses in his study of "The Master Builder"—as the dialogue of the "second degree." "It is not in the actions," Maeterlinck writes, in his essay on *The Tragical in Daily Life*, speaking more especially of the drama of Sophocles, "but in the words that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies that are truly beautiful and great, and this not solely in the words that accompany

and explain the action, for there must perforce be another dialogue besides the one which is superficially necessary. And indeed the only words that count in the play are those which at first sight seemed useless, for it is therein that the essence lies. Side by side with the necessary dialogue will you almost always find another dialogue that seems superfluous . . . it is the quality and the scope of this unnecessary dialogue that determine the quality and the immeasurable range of the work . . . it is just those words that are spoken by the side of the rigid, apparent truth, that constitute the mysterious beauty of the most beautiful tragedies, inasmuch as these are words that conform to a deeper truth. . . ." *Le Trésor des Humbles.*

In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, in *Alladine et Palomides*, in *Aglavaine et Selysette*, emotion is virtually both plot and episode. So far as the method of these three love-dramas admits of a rough critical analysis, the scheme varies but little. We are usually confronted with a small company of personages, who, by a first touch significantly indicative of a primary remove from familiar realities, are mostly relegated to the ranks of the indeterminate royalty prevailing in the world of *Volksmärchen.* Amongst the groups the distinctive

grades of life in its temporal aspect are generally introduced. Old age (Arkel, Ablamore, Méligrane); manhood and womanhood in ripe maturity, yet, almost as we watch, leaning towards the downward incline, treading the road that descends the hill (Goland, Aglavaine, Méléandre). Childhood is presented, childhood absolute—(le petit Yniold, la petite Yssaline) with, to recur to a distinctive feature of these plays, the immature womanhood of elder children whose childhood is over, whose playtime is past, Selysette, " la pauvre petite," Mélisande, " une petite fille dans le forêt "; Pelléas, too, the boy lover, no less a child: " Vous êtes des enfants," is Goland's cry as he surprises the two when the doves take flight from Mélisande's tower; Alladine, " une âme d'enfant, d'un pauvre enfant sans force."

Thus life passes in review before us, severed into those great divisions defined, with an intuitive accuracy which rejects the fallible measuring line of years, youth—when the future, age—when the past, is the weight that turns the balance of existence.

Having evoked this representative group—man and woman, child and youth—we are made aware of the links that bind one to the other and each to all. They are bonds belonging now to one, now to another, of the two

planes, the ideal and the real. They are founded sometimes upon the true fellowship of souls :—

MÉLÉANDRE (to AGLAVAINE). Tu me parais antérieure à tout ce que je sais, je sens ton âme mieux que je ne sens la mienne, tu est plus près de moi que tout moi-même.

AGLAVAINE (to MÉLÉANDRE). Je ne suis réelle que lorsque tu es là. . . . Je ne sais déjà plus si tu es ma clarté ou si je deviens ta lumière . . . déjà nos deux âmes se parlent bien avant que notre bouche s'ouvre.

More often the fellowship is soldered by the hands of passion at the forge of fate :—

PALOMIDES. . . . Un hasard est venu . . . et j'ai reconnu qu'il devait y avoir une chose plus incompréhensible que la beauté de l'âme la plus belle ou du visage le plus beau, et plus puissante aussi, puisqu'il faut bien que je lui obéisse. . . .

Behind the scenes of events that pass by, the central figures stand subjected to the inexorable coercion of vast impersonal factors in whose hands the helm of the earth-ship lies, those three "unsent-for things" of Gaelic proverb—love, jealousy, and fear. Likewise we see them subjected to the influence of other passions, emanations from the soul—

pity, the self-vision where all other men's sins find pardon, and, as in Selysette, as in Astolaine, the love whose pulse is sacrifice.

And each man, each woman, draws to himself or to herself that special catastrophe, emotional or actual, ideal or real, which is in affinity with his or her individual temperament or with the decree of that inscrutable personality, the soul within the soul, that lies beneath and beyond temperament. Some are endowed with the faculty by which events are atrophied :—

ABLAMORE. Il y a des hommes qui semblent détourner les événements. . . . J'avais des amis dont la présence semblait attirer toutes les aventures ; mais les jours où je sortais avec eux à la rencontre des joies ou des douleurs, ils s'en revenaient les mains vides. . . . Je crois que j'ai paralysé la destinée. . . .

Or, in Palomides' words : " Un hasard est venu—ou c'est peut-être moi qui suis venu . . ." Others, contrariwise, call events to them. The aged King, stretching with tremulous hands his arms to the vast horizons, summoned calamities from the realms of destiny which overwhelmed his reason and devastated his house : " Il appelait autour de nous les événements qui se cachaient depuis

longtemps à l'horizon. Ils sont venus, hélas ! plus tôt et plus nombreux qu'il ne s'y attendait, et quelque jours ont suffi pour qu'ils régnent à sa place."

Thus and for ever where wisdom, " l'âme intérieure," leaves the entrances of life unguarded, where the rash warden of the keys challenges the attack of predatory spiritual nomads, love, hate, suffering, and death approach what must in most instances be regarded as their unresisting victim, and the master passion of the hour, possessed of its prey, henceforth dominates all the issues of life. Virtues themselves have power to ravish joy.

AGLAVAINE. J'étais venue ici plus sage qu'il ne faut l'être . . . mais maintenant j'ai reconnu qu'il ne faut pas que la bonté soit sage. . . . Ah ! c'est d'avoir si peu de chose que d'avoir raison ! [and three lives are wrecked by her coming].

But whatever may be the specific emotional force, it flashes momentarily its dyed limelight upon the face of girl or woman, man or youth ; and those faces that hitherto moved before us in the apathetic neutrality of a human puppet-show are stirred from their cataleptic repose. For a brief instant the voices ring clear and resonant, as the voices of sleepers awakened,

and some vivid vitality seems to kindle until in the eclipse of joy the light fails and life makes surrender to the eternal silences. The mist of that twilight which lies like a grey haze between us and all the actors in Maeterlinck's dramas floats back, enclosing all; the colours are lost in it, the strings of life are muted almost before they are touched, the feet of men and women fall muffled as footsteps on the snow. The curtain drops on figures faintly seen as shadows in the dusk, on words that sound as echoes, intermingled and confused, while the consistent incoherency of the sentences would seem alternately related to *les événements idéaux* and to the train of parallel actualities. And as phrases belonging to two severed existences, they express the contradictions resulting from the interaction of soul and body, contributing not a little to the apparently intentional obscurity of outline which conduces to the atmospheric effect of Maeterlinck's art.

As regards theme, in two out of the three early love dramas, in *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Alladine et Palomides*, the issues depend upon the workings of an involuntary, semi-conscious and wholly emotional passion, an ambushed calamity of adverse destiny. In both love gives what is not its own to give,

and love takes what belongs in honour to another. For the nature of the passion depicted Maeterlinck has created a special type. His conception is peculiarly his own. Between the theoretical ideas of love as wholly spiritual or wholly material there lie for most of us the idea of innumerable intermediate loves, loves of as many grades as the flame of burning salt-wood has colours, where body and soul, in infinitely differing proportions, play each its generating part. "Not soul helps body more than flesh helps soul," was a doctrine Novalis embodied in his one mystic romance. Love born of both receives of each its own element of perfectness which, in mortal spheres, either without the other cannot attain. For Novalis, according to the simplest interpretation of what is rather an atmosphere than a dogma of his transcendental mysticism, the body supplies corporeal form, it incarnates the spirit of love. The soul endows matter, "the shadow of the inward image," with spiritual vitality, with infinity, with immortality. Conjointly and in the union of the two, the fire that scorches and consumes becomes the flame that illuminates and aspires, and Love's strength, in a new sense, is "centred in his wings." The form fades, but the only thing love can truly love is love,

and love, redeemed of earth's envelope, is no longer of time but of eternity. "Was mich so unzertrennlich zu dir zieht ist nicht aus dieser Zeit." The hero-lover of the Ofterdingen romance proclaims Novalis's own creed. The vision-stream, the rushing death-river, which divides for an hour the lovers who love upon earth, becomes, as the dream progresses, the blue firmament over their heads in the land where the divided meet. One fragmentary sentence, which a half-drawn breath of personal passion sets apart, epitomises his faith: "A union riveted also for death is a marriage which gives to us a companion for the night. . . ."

Neither body nor soul can claim sole, or can indeed be held to share, responsibility for the love depicted by Maeterlinck. In love, as in life, the dualities of existence are emphasised. The love of the soul within, "l'amour qui ignore les petites choses de l'amour," love, "l'amour prédestiné et véritable," whose fountain-head, to quote from the prose works, is in "les grandes villes spirituelles où nous vivons sans le savoir," is of one essence. Love of the sense-soul, whose auxiliaries are physical instincts, is of another. It is sometimes "définitif dans les premiers cercles de l'homme," but penetrates no further, and is

an exile for ever from the sacred precincts where true wisdom abides. Over its disasters, griefs, losses, "nos yeux pleurent mais notre âme ne pleure pas."

Such is the love Mélisande bears to Pelléas, Alladine to Palomides, such likewise was the love of Maleine for Hjalmar, which seeking, with defect of truth, what was its own, would, we may divine, equally have sought what was by right another's. In fact, in these three central feminine figures of Maeterlinck's creation, the love and the fashion of loving scarcely admits of any distinction. Moreover, in the two later plays it is love in antagonism to all loyalties, truths, and generosities of the heart. It obliterates for man and woman every affection which controverts the egoism of passion. Alladine loves Palomides in defiance of every bond of gratitude that binds the Arcadian child to the aged King in whose brain pain and jealousy unhinge reason. Palomides loves Alladine in spite of his troth-giving to the clear-eyed, white-souled Astolaine. So loving he sacrifices the faith in which he dimly discerns his frustrated soul's true destiny :—

PALOMIDES (to ASTOLAINE). En vous rencontrant . . . il m'a semblé que je trouvais enfin ce que j'avais cherché durant un grand nombre d'années. . . . On eut dit que j'avais vécu jusqu'alors dans

une chambre fermée, que vous aviez ouverte ; et j'ai su tout à coup ce que devait être l'âme des autres hommes et ce que la mienne aurait pu devenir.

But Alladine, the slave from Arcady, frail, childish, truthless, her hands full of flowers, her white-fleeced lamb at her side, has come, and Palomides abandons Astolaine with the avowal, " Je t'aime aussi . . . plus que celle que j'aime." Mélisande, succoured, shielded, cherished by her husband, under the shelter of his tenderness and trust, carrying his unborn child at her heart, keeps lover's tryst with Pelléas, supplementing untruth of deed with untruth of tongue. " As-tu . . . avez-vous été coupables ? " asks Goland, claiming the truth, that he may absolve the sin :—

MÉLISANDE. Non, non, nous n'avons pas été coupables.

Pelléas, despite his soul's faint protest, despite the futile, whispering remorse of a nobler manhood, signs a truce with disloyalty and betrays his brother with tame self-acquittal :—

PELLÉAS. Nous ne faisons ce que nous voulons.

A different phase of passion characterises Aglavaine et Selysette. The mental outlook is changed. The soul takes its part in the

loves of both the women there represented. It burdens Selysette's fresh gaiety with a consecrating touch; it fires their hearts with an altar-flame of sacrifice; each contends against her rival for the divine prerogative, for the monopoly of suffering. Nevertheless the ways of the soul are the ways of the soul, and the way of the heart, the heart of woman and man, is still the way of the heart. And thus it falls out that whether or no the soul participate in the action, the actors must expiate in sorrow and death a creed too high for earth's holding:—

AGLAVAINE (to SELYSETTE). J'aime, j'aime Méléandre, Méléandre m'aime, il t'aime aussi, tu nous aimes l'un et l'autre, et cependant nous ne pourrions pas vivre heureux parce que l'heure n'est pas encore venue où les êtres humains peuvent s'unir ainsi.

It follows that one and all these plays are tragedies; love allowed no less than love disallowed comes only to end in adversity. We catch, it is true, glimpses of that fashion of loving which is the sun *inconscient* of existence, but for the most part love in its ordinary meaning as the "reciprocal action of two individual lovers," the specialised attraction of man for woman, woman for man, appears

mainly as a very death-lure to human hearts, to their probity as to their joy.

Love romance of all times since Cressida forsook Troilus, Francesca loved Paolo, Iseult Tristram, has familiarised us with results, no less destructive to happiness, of the supremacy of passion over will. And it is not in the effects, but in the nature and essence of love portrayed by Maeterlinck, that his romance dramas stand thrice removed from the lovers' tales of the days of Gottfried von Strassburg, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and their fellows. This graft of emotional passion, upspringing in some morally neutral region of a human personality, a graft usually generated, according to the text, in some outer borderland of self, a germ precipitated into being by "la destinée extérieure," is a thing alien to the conceptions of older poets. So too is the accentuated, reiterated doctrine that the soul, holding itself silent and remote, is no factor in the tragedy. Fate, hazard, are the sole agents. "Je croyais que tu avais agi comme nous agissons presque tous . . . sans que rien de notre âme intervienne," the old King tells Alladine.

In the contradictions of the dialogue between Pelléas and Mélisande, in Mélisande's reiterated denials of guilt in the death-chamber scene, the same idea prevails.

PELLÉAS. Depuis quand m'aimes-tu ?

MÉLISANDE. Depuis toujours. . . . Depuis que je t'ai vu. . . .

PELLÉAS. Je ne t'aimais pas la première fois que je t'ai vu.

MÉLISANDE. Moi non plus.

But if the soul, exempt from every blame, uncontaminated by every wrong-doing, remains unaffected within its citadel of wisdom, if it has no part nor lot in emotions which are neither blameless nor white-handed, neither can we feel that the impulses let loose by "le hasard noir" have the merits of normal instincts. We are not in the presence of those healthful earth-bred senses, "the superior animals" of Novalis's creed, the senses, impulses, and instincts of the material man, which for good or ill governed the lives of earlier love heroines. From that kindred of the wild sprang the passions of unspiritualised natures, of Cleopatra, of Brünhild, and all their sisterhood. Fierce, jealous, carnal, leading to evil, maybe, they still retain the primitive virtues of their guilt. They are passions of instinct, but not of depraved and ignoble instincts, passions of sense but of undegraded senses, passions of natures which have, even in their fever, some racial wholesomeness, and they possess every strength of man- and

womanhood save the climax and concentration of strength—self-control. That they lack somewhat in their materialism is doubtless true. In passion, as in all else, spirit is the extension of matter. That extension they have not. Spirit is, to quote Novalis's metaphor, "as the vowel to the consonant." That prolongation is not theirs. Yet if the soul has denied to them that mixture of spirit which, surmounting all barriers of clay, possesses the horizonless infinite, they need but that gift alone and, as genius has painted them, touch the outmost boundary of mortality. "Even in the poor perverted reason of Giovanni and Annabella" (so runs Charles Lamb's commentary on the play Maeterlinck has translated and adapted from John Ford's drama) "we discern traces of that fiery particle, which in the irregular starting from out the road of beaten action, discovers something of a right line, even in obliquity, and shows hints of an improvable greatness in the lowest descents and degradations of our nature."

Mortal or infinite, whatsoever may be their quality, no such primitive storm-winds sweep across the misted seas or shake the dim forest recesses in Maeterlinck's dramas. In them the senses are summoned only to a semi-

conscious, automatic co-operation with the emotions. The will, the brain, all faculties of action, succumb, as if blunted under a spell. They become spellbound as the will, as the thoughts and deeds of a trance. The passiveness of sleep underlies the utmost violence of word and movement. Moreover, reproducing the type of the Princesse Maleine, from—possibly—a desire to emphasise the incorporeal origin of the emotional passion with Mélisande, with Alladine, we are still in the land where the emotions of womanhood are transplanted into the hearts of children; where their action is that of parasites of sentiment which, like the strangling creepers with close-leaved tendrils and heavy-scented blossoms of tropical growths, enfold their prey, bringing sickness of heart and body, chill languors, fever, contagion, and death.

Euphrasia, who plays the time-honoured part of the girl-page, in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Philaster," perhaps comes nearest in English dramatic romance to Maeterlinck's type of *l'enfant-femme*. But the points of likeness do little more than enhance the sense of dissimilitude between the elder and later playwrights. Euphrasia loves Philaster with an equally rash devotion and a more complete self-oblivion than Mélisande Pelléas or Alladine

Palomides. Yet Euphrasia's passion frames no pleas of ignorance; it is no blind unconscious movement of the heart coming no whence and, so far as the conscious will is concerned, tending no whither. It is love, sharply defined, a child's wholly imaginative worship springing from a child's preconceived ideal. That ideal she sees embodied in Philaster, the prince and hero of her dreams, in whose royalty her life is crowned:—"Sir, you did take me up when I was nothing; and only yet am something by being yours." Her passion asks for and receives no recompense of love, demands no response, claims nothing save the inalienable right to give. No note of jarring prematurity taints the dew, the freshness, the freedom of that slight figure in the "gay attire" she deprecates, and no words in all the play ring truer than her own appraisement of the life she is eager to surrender: "'Tis not a life, 'tis but a piece of childhood thrown away,"—a piece of childhood of which are the kingdoms of loyalty, truth, and honour.

The world has aged, the images Maeterlinck evokes are of its later clay. They show the fragile childhood of a fragile child with the hands, voice, eyes, feet, lips of an unawakened life, while far within a silent soul sleeps un-

troubled upon a distant throne. The emotional obsession which lodges itself in the heart penetrates neither soul nor body. It is barely more than a vaporous, noxious ferment, distilling itself within the vase of life; it blurs the crystal surface, it films the clear glass. The frame of childhood dissolves, childhood itself withers to death. Maleine sickened of a nameless malady, although the poisoned draught commanded by La Reine Anne was innocuous. She would, one may divine, have died even had the Queen drawn no silken cord round the small throat of her victim:—

MALEINE. Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! comme je suis malade! Et je ne sais pas ce que j'ai . . . et personne ne sait pas ce que j'ai, le médecin ne sait pas ce que j'ai, ma nourrice ne sait pas ce que j'ai. . . .

Alladine and Palomides, rescued from the death awaiting them in the subterranean grotto of their last love scene, die though the peril of the water-pools is overpast:—

LE MÉDECIN. Ils souffrent tous les deux du même mal, et c'est un mal que je ne connais pas.

Mélisande, wounded with a wound of which "a little bird could not have died," dies, as she was born, for no reason—"sans raison." For Selysette, who has taken her life into her

own inexperienced hands, who has stolen the key from the grasp of the angel of death, " on ne lui voit aucune blessure et son pauvre petit corps semble intact." Nevertheless, the little thread of blood stains her lips and life ebbs apace.

Reading a symbol into such death scenes, it may appear to some amongst us that it is not Maleine, Mélisande, Alladine, but childhood itself which there expires, stricken to a here-afterless death by emotions whose association with childhood is in itself a disease, a malady of nerve, a distortion of imagination. Such emotions, rooted in their fitting soil, set in their proper groundwork of completed woman-hood, transpierced with the love of a mature woman's soul, and welded with the earth-born love of a woman's natural instincts, no less God-given because more overtly human, are the vitality of life. Severed from their true conditions of health by a morbid prematurity of development, unbalanced by the accumu-lated distractions of a ripened heart and brain, they illustrate the vitality of disease, moral, physical, and mental. Childhood has come too recently from the freedom of the infinite to bear the narrow yoke of passion's servitude unharmed. At the fret of the chain it languishes for the wide horizons of its prenatal homeland

—the land of parable in *The Blue Bird*—the Kingdom of the Unborn. And though in cases out of number life survives that inarticulate nostalgia, the woman in all the years to be bears with her (and the mark abides) the burden of the childhood slain too soon and lost for ever. It takes the genius of Maeterlinck to make that all-pitiful type acceptable even to the æsthetic taste. It will also take more than his genius, with all the accessory obscurities, suggestions and unrealities of symbolic drama, to reconcile us to the sincerity of a conception which presents the spectacle of an innocence unimpaired by untruth of word and untruth of deed. "Innocence is a moral instinct," Novalis affirms. And setting aside the question of purity of heart and clean-handedness of body, it is an instinct which recognises, even if it has not the strength to fulfil, the spiritual laws. Lies are not truth, deception is not honour, and betrayal of trust is not loyalty; and although in "la morale mystique," as here set in action, the immaculate soul of every forlorn little sinner may carry "dans ses yeux le sourire transparent de l'enfant," the tears of Mélisande's last hour may be truly, as the old King watching her proclaims, the tears of "son âme qui pleure."

IV

DEATH DRAMAS

As in recent essays death has occupied a very considerable place in the meditations of the philosopher-moralist, so, even more, in the works of the poet-dramatist, death played, it might almost be said, the title-rôle. Maeterlinck has himself defined the fundamental belief underlying his first presentments of human life, sentiment and action: "a belief in immense powers, invisible and fatalistic, of which no man may know the purpose, but whose intentions the spirit of the dramas assumes to be malevolent." These forces take cognisance of all our actions, are hostile to life, peace, happiness, exercising a jurisdiction of injustice, whose penalties are, maybe, only a manifestation of the caprice of fate. A dual idea, the idea of the God of Christianity merged with that of the Destiny of ancient faiths, underlies the issues of events. A God and a Destiny lurking in the impenetrable

obscurity of night and nature, as a Force unknown, which Force takes upon it, more often than any other shape, the form and semblance of death. "Du reste, c'est une mort indifferente et inexorable, aveugle, tâtonnant à peu près au hasard, emportant de préférence les plus jeunes et les moins malheureux, simplement parce qu'ils se tiennent moins tranquilles que les plus misérables et que tout mouvement trop brusque dans la nuit attire son attention."[1]

From every vital belief, formulated during those mental and emotional crises in the spiritual history of humanity when men are won to a magnetised acceptance of new or resuscitated ideas, there radiate effluences, which effluences, starting from one axis and centre of thought, diverge, as the spokes of a wheel, farther and farther the one from the other, as they penetrate the spaces of futurity. The idea of death promulgated in the first eras of Christianity was not slow to follow the law attending the diffusion of primary apostolic conceptions incident to the new faith. With indomitable courage and confidence Christianity had laid its axe to the root of fear. It had proclaimed a spiritual interpretation of that most rigid of all physical facts, it had pronounced the grave

[1] Preface to *Théâtre*, Vol. I.

a delusion of the senses and asserted the victory of life over corruption. From the ordeal, ordained as the penalty of sin alone (for "death is unnatural to the body"[1]), the ordeal of the market-place where all roads meet, the dread was lifted, and the darkness of dissolution, to the eye of faith, became but the shadowy arch of the gateway leading to the land of eternal light. And if Christian doctrine had in some measure substituted the terror of immortality for the exorcised terror of the tomb, it was still logically the substitution of an avoidable, a preventable ill for an inevitable doom. It transferred the venue of fear from the sphere of a material certainty, patent to every man's senses, to the sphere of an unseen moral possibility, patent only to faith, and placed the determining power of the issues of eternity, happiness or misery, in the will of man himself.

Fathers of the Church summed up the new death doctrines: "An awful thing is death and full of terror, but not to those who have learnt the true wisdom which is above. . . . He that knows nothing concerning things to come . . . with reason is afraid. . . . But we deem this action to be a departure to another place." Death was the tremendous crisis of

[1] Cyril of Alexandria.

transition, where the faint spark of man's vital torch is consumed in that all-embracing flame of infinity, whose comparative radiance is as the effulgence of the noonday sun to a taper's flickering light.

The personification of death was strictly negatived. True, images and metaphors abound. Death is the reaper of the harvest; he is the rider of the pale horse of the Apocalypse. To St. Augustin's vision the dead flock as sheep to their fold: "Death is their shepherd." In the Gospel of Nicodemus Death is identified with the Prince of Hell, the keeper of the under-world. Nevertheless, behind all these figures the image is overtly an image and no more; behind reaper, rider, shepherd there is nothing but an abstraction; the death they symbolise is within, not without a man, the emblems are but masks thought puts on—they are, in the true sense of apocryphal allegorists, "similitudes." "Is death either some thing or some power?" asks Augustin, anticipating misapprehension. He confutes the proposition in terms that prohibit the possibility of any literal interpretation of ecclesiastical symbolism. "Death is the separation of soul and body," a separation terminable at the day of resurrection. This death doctrine the rites of the Church, the daily orisons of the

faithful, perpetuated. Death, in the memento of the Mass, was recorded under the gentlest of its synonyms—sleep. The dead were those who "dormiunt in somno pacis." The approach of death was heralded by the sacrament tendered to the Church's dying children, of which the very name is fraught with significance, it is the viaticum for the soul's wayfaring, the spiritual sustenance provided for the soul as it sets forth upon the pilgrimage of eternity.

From that initial conception the new creed of death was launched upon the current of thought. The culture worlds of theology, the culture worlds of lay philosophy, remoulded the idea each according to its own bias.

Mysticism took up the word. "We pass from one life to another," wrote a fourteenth-century saint, "and each life in turn calls that passing death." Transcendentalism, incarnate in Novalis, translated it into the language of the illuminated cloudland where his imagination wandered. Death, for him, is the great physical deception. It is the triumphant emancipation, not the subjugation, of life; it is the gallant exit of the spirit from its long earthly exile. His mystic optimism was epitomised in one brief faith. Life was good, life was desirable, and death *was* life. Nor were

his doctrines concerning that most formidable of earth's catastrophes a fabric merely wrought from impersonal imaginations. The figure of death had confronted him at every turn of the road during the twenty-eight years of his short life. Not only Sophie von Kühn, his fifteen-year-old betrothed, but Erasmus, his twin spirit and best-loved brother, "with whom he shared his brain and heart," had died in their days of joy and youth. His sister, likewise, and the younger brother (the tidings of whose death precipitated his own) had fallen victims to the fatal malady by which he too was stricken. But while deaths crowded upon deaths, the sentences in his letters, diaries, and poems, recording one by one the overwhelming sorrow, the agony of losses as deeply felt as they were courageously endured, ring, with only transitory lapses of despair, in true unison with his professed belief, with the inveterate hopefulness which was his crown. "Sei getröst. Erasmus hat überwunden," so ran his announcement of his brother's death. "Für Sophien kann ich nicht klagen," for death was her home-going. His dying sister is "die Siegerin." The separation of the grave only served as a transference of the incompleteness of life to the regions of eternal fulfilment. The dead are

the living, and souls still detained in their mortal tenement, detaching themselves from earthly preoccupations, may enter in spirit that homeland beyond the tomb by faith, love, and hope.

Nor, when the silent feet of the great messenger approached his own threshold with beckoning hand, did the accent of good cheer change. He will die gaily, as a young poet dies: "Ich will fröhlich sterben wie ein junger Dichter. . . . In heiterer Ruh will ich den Augenblick erwarten." Even more, his dying shall be the willing expression of his aspirations: "Mein Tod soll Beweis meiner Gefühle für das Höchste sein; ächte Aufopferung, nicht Nothmittel."

To pass from the death doctrines of Christian Fathers, from the conception of the new faith in its simplest aspect; from the death which was viewed neither as a force nor a person, but as the cessation of that earthly condition of existence we call the life of man, to the mental attitude of lay mysticism represented by Novalis, is to follow the idea from its fountain-head to where a tributary current of thought reclothed a religious doctrine in the novel formulas of imaginative romanticism. To pass from that rest-house of mystic enchantments to the specu-

lative transcendentalism of Maeterlinck's philosophic essays is again to arrive at a further cross-road where religious doctrine is supplanted, not rehabilitated, by an acquiescence he would render hopefully serene, in the present inadequacy of reason, science, or faith to penetrate the secrecies *d'outre-tombe.*

In later prose meditations, in the austere calm of his final treatise *La Mort,* in the mystery play of *The Blue Bird,* Maeterlinck brought a message of courage, if not of hope. In the Garden of the Dead he sought to rob the graveyard of its sleepers :—

> MYTYL (looking in the grass). Where are the dead ?
> TYLTYL (looking also). There are no dead. . . .

In the early death dramas, where his genius as artist and poet found perhaps its culminating triumph, he pursued a wholly different and alien trend of thought.

It was a reversion, a retrograde movement of imagination, to more primitive, more instinctive apprehensions of the significance of mortality. Peasant superstitions, surviving amongst the unlettered villagers, folk-tale and folk-legend, had discarded the intellectualised death doctrine which refused personality to death. " Is Death some thing or some power ? " St. Augustin's question, answered in the nega-

tive by the authoritative voice of the Christian Church, was answered in the affirmative by the death legends of the people, by their clandestine practices and inarticulate beliefs. True, for generation after generation in Western Europe, the peasant had listened with docile, unquestioning assent to the articles of Christian faith; he had assisted, as piety dictated, at the offices of the dying and the ceremonials of the dead. But listening, assenting, praying, he went straightway forth from church and altar, to formulate at his own hearth, with sublime unconsciousness, a creed, bred in his own heart, of human nature's devising, not only supplemental, but at many points independent of his professed and formal faith. Christianity had had its say, but the mind of the peasant eluded its catechism. With the inveterate tendency to personification displayed in all ages by unintellectualised humanity, he dismissed the abstract idea presented by theologian and philosopher. Death to him was not a law; it was not a force of nature, not a part of the divine ordinance of fallen creation. The death myth of the people embodied an active, personal reality. "Votre vie aura une fin," God said to Adam—so runs an oral tradition of the Vosges districts—"et la Mort fut créée."

Two out of Maeterlinck's four death dramas suggest a trend of imagination which treads the very path of peasant lore. Expressed or unexpressed, the idea of death in these dramatic scenes, even if not directly embodied is systematically exteriorised. "On ne l'a pas vue mais on l'a entendue passer," another Vosges folk-tale affirms of that dreaded visitant, and the note of prosaic accuracy gives a curious reality to the assertion. In Mélisande's death-chamber the exclamation of the old King, incredulous that death could enter his presence unrecognised, "je n'ai rien vu, je n'ai rien entendu," comes as an echo from the same world where, though not always visible, death's passing is so surely detected.

And all Maeterlinck's figures of romance, kings, queens, men, women, children, fade into phantoms, to ghosts who walk in dreams, beside the reality he has known how to confer upon that imageless personality who in *L'Intruse* enters the long avenue by the cypress wood, where the nightingales hush their song and the swans seek the farther shore of the moonlit water. Step by step, with feet that leave no print upon the ground, the advent of the unbidden guest announces its gradual approach to the house where the sick woman

lies. For here as in *conte* after *conte* death sends his warning, the *intersigne* of Breton tradition, to herald his coming. Many are the portents known to folk-lore. A chill breath of wind in a windless night, the sound of tears that fall where no man weeps, the whisper of voices where no voices are, the splash of oars where no boat nears the shore, a lighted taper barring a twilight road. Signs patent to the seer, but sealed to those whose spiritual senses are shut to them.

Maeterlinck's genius has translated the very atmosphere of Celtic folk-legend into art, as the six watchers, who occupy the stage in his play, carry on their broken dialogue after the manner of companions worn with long suspense, and but half released from their worst fears. The group, according to his custom, comprehends three generations—the old, the mature, the young: L'Aïeul, Le Père, Les trois Filles. In an inner chamber the sick woman and a new-born child sleep. The crisis is over, the watchers may, if they will, repose; they may " même rire un peu " as they await the coming of the *réligieuse* for whose presence the patient craves. Yet disquietude deepens as the dusk throws its shadows around. The three daughters go upon an errand; they hold each other by the hand. The touch is signifi-

cant; it is the action of children afraid. The old man speaks the thought of all:—

L'Aïeul. Je ne sais pas ce que j'ai; je ne suis pas tranquil. . . . Je voudrais que cette soirée fût passée!

From the window where she waits the eldest sister gazes into the gathering night. Does she see anything, anyone? No—nothing—no one. "Un peu de vent s'élève dans l'avenue." And the nightingales have ceased their song. "Je crois que quelqu'un est entré dans le jardin, grand-père." The swans have taken fright. "Tu ne vois personne?" "Personne, mon père." The minutes go by; in the country, in all the country round, there is "un silence de mort." It grows late. To the old man it seems that the chamber becomes suddenly chill—"le froid entre"—and the strained ears catch the grinding of a scythe:—

L'Aïeul (tressaillant). Oh! . . .

Le Père. C'est le jardinier qui va faucher. . . . Il fauche pendant la nuit? . . . Il fauche autour de la maison? . . .

("Death, thou art a mower, too!")

L'Aïeul. Moi, je l'entends comme s'il fauchait dans la maison. . . .

and the lamp glimmers dim:—

L'Aïeul. Il n'y a personne à la porte vitrée? . . . Je croyait que quelqu'un attendait. . . . J'ai entendu

marcher lentement. . . . J'entends (to the father) les pas de votre sœur ! . . .

At the little door is a sound of knocking. The servant is without ? Is it she who weeps ? Is it she who opened the outer door ?

LA SERVANTE. C'est moi qui ai fermée la porte.

LE PÈRE. Elle était ouverte ?

LA SERVANTE. Oui. . . .

Death has mounted the stair. A seventh watcher sits at the table :—

L'AÏEUL. Vous êtes tous autour de la table ? . . .

LA FILLE. Oui, grand-père.

Each in turn replies as the old blind man calls them by name : " Mais qui est-ce qui est assis là ? "

LA FILLE. Où donc, grand-père ? Il n'y a personne. . . .

L'AIEUL. Pourquoi tremblez vous toutes les trois, mes filles ?

And then the dialogue, punctuated with silences, dies away and the moon casts wandering lights upon the pale faces of the frightened sisters. Death is waiting here, as in many a Celtic story, for her whose hour is so soon to arrive. For he is patient. " Je vis un homme qui allait et venait, les bras derrière le dos, du pas nonchalant de quelqu'un qui attend," so a Breton *conte* tells its tale.

And for some half-hour or more the shadow of that figure passes and repasses the window of the Breton kitchen, where in his *lit clos* old Marco Hamon waits the end. Thus, too, in the play Death neither retards nor precipitates the hour; he is as punctual as he is patient. "Minuit sonne et, au dernier coup, il semble . . . qu'on entende, très vaguement, un bruit comme de quelqu'un qui se lèverait en toute hâte," is the stage direction which precedes the exclamation of the blind watcher:—

L'Aïeul. Qui est-ce qui s'est lèvé? . . . Il y a quelqu'un qui s'est lèvé de table!

Upon the threshold of the inner chamber the door has opened, and the nurse "s'incline en faisant le signe de la croix pour annoncer la mort de la femme."

"Tous les jours vont à la mort; le dernier y arrive," was the dictum of old Michel Montaigne. Here it is reversed. It is death who seeks out man. He waits for the clock to strike its passing bell, for the sand of the hour-glass to run out. "Où est-il l'homme dont l'heure arrive?" said a voice by the river-side, where a chance passer-by, wondering like the unconverted apostle, hearing a voice and seeing no man, tarried awhile to see what might befall. Twice was the

summons repeated. Then came a man running, speechless with haste, and the runner forded the river, and he fell, and the water took him, and the bubbles rose over him and he died. For every man comes in time for death to find him.

So death passed in *L'Intruse* to " la chambre mortuaire," and it may be said that no artist has outrivalled Maeterlinck in his power of making that passing felt, outrivalled his power of surrounding that invisible presence with an atmosphere which is not merely an effect, as it were, but an emanation.

And he has lent the whole force of his art, and here it excels itself, to enhance the terror of that exteriorised, personified force, to enhance the impression of an ineradicable instinct of dread, the blind animal dread of humankind, " les Aveugles," at the neighbourhood of death. His appeal is to the involuntary sensation of fear which Montaigne's essay on death combated with philosophic reasoning, denouncing with resolute manhood every artificial environment that might serve to unhinge men's nerve at the approach of what " est moins à craindre que rien." " Les enfants," he wrote in the same vein, using an unwontedly imaginative phraseology, " ont peur de leurs amis mesmes quand

ils les voyent masquez," therefore from the face of death, " il faut oster le masque." This is precisely what Maeterlinck has refrained from doing, nor is it ever the face of a friend which the mask, for him, covers. Never has the shrouded cruelty of death been more ruthlessly delineated than in the sinister horror of *La Mort de Tintagiles*. There death—or that destiny which deals death forth—is throned behind a curtain as inscrutable, as impenetrable, as the " grande porte de fer " behind which the sombre figure of the mysterious Queen is divined, whose murderous hands are without pity for the frail child whom love wards in vain from the stroke of fate. She is savage, monstrous, always unseen :—

YGRAINE. Ceux qui l'ont vue n'osent plus en parler. . . . Mais qui sait s'ils l'ont vue ? Elle a une puissance que l'on ne comprend pas ; et nous vivons ici avec un grand poids sans merci sur notre âme.

Thus the pale sister, Ygraine, forewarns the little new-comer, the doomed child brought back, by device of that unknown power, to the castle shadowed by the Tower of Dread. And in the last scene when the torn hands of Ygraine beat helplessly against the iron barrier behind which the child cries for succour in the dark vault below the tower, Maeterlinck has

drawn death indeed as "un événement masqué," and the mask is one of limitless terror, and the infinite darkness is unilluminated by any ray of hope, and the mask and the wearer of the mask are one and the same, and beyond the darkness there is—night.

With the single exception of the child in *La Mort de Tintagiles*, it is noticeable that in the four death dramas our interest in death's victims as living personalities is minimised. Our attention is riveted upon that impersonated force divorced and apart from its human association. We never see the face of the dying woman in *L'Intruse;* the drowned girl, "l'étrange petite âme," of *Intérieur* remains from first to last unseen, unnamed. Of the dead priest in *Les Aveugles* we know scarcely more than that he is dead. Death, not the priest, is the leading actor around whom blind age, blind man- and womanhood, blind youth and infancy grope forlorn in the double darkness of eyes that see not and of night which falls.

So far as *Les Aveugles* is to be regarded as a death drama, the action is over before the play begins. Conjecturally—for whether the reading be right or wrong none but the author can decide—*Les Aveugles* presents, if not an allegory, at least a scene where the spiritual

parallel is all-important; where if Maeterlinck has drawn death, albeit symbolically, from life, he has drawn it simultaneously from the wider standpoint indicated by a significant phrase of the essay "*L'Immortalité*," where speaking of "un peuple d'aveugles-nés," he justifies the analogy as "la comparaison qui . . . résume le mieux notre situation parmi la nuit des mondes." In the drama we are face to face with the same image, the image of a blind humanity clamouring, guideless, in the night for one to guide them.

It is a play of which it is impossible to give any adequate second-hand appreciation to readers who are not conversant with the text. All the personages of the drama are anonymous, the scene never shifts, the same persons always occupy it, there is not a single entrance or exit. And these figures are of six men and six women, of whom one, l'Aveugle-Folle, holds a sleeping infant upon her knee. The men on one side, the women on the other, are grouped under the shadows, the "faithful shadows of willow and cypress trees. Between the two groups the dead priest, who has led them thus far from the distant asylum which harbours their distress, is propped against the grey trunk of a decaying oak. Old and weary, he has fallen asleep, wrapped in his

dark cloak, and death has taken him in slumber unaware.

The little flock he has shepherded have no cognisance of that dumb and motionless presence :—

TROISIÈME AVEUGLE-NÉ. . . . Causons un peu en attendant le retour du prêtre.

DEUXIÈME AVEUGLE-NÉ. Savez vous où est allé le prêtre ?

TROISIÈME. Il me semble qu'il nous abandonne trop longtemps. . . .

He has left them perhaps to seek the right path ? Maybe to bring food and water ? But whither is he gone, and why does he stay so long ? Do the women know aught ? Do the men ? Has he gone there where a lighthouse stands of which they have heard tell ? . . . Only to the youngest, La plus jeune Aveugle, with her shining hair, had he spoken before he went from them :—

LA PLUS JEUNE AVEUGLE. Il lui faudrait aller très loin. . . .

To the rest he had but said a simple, "bonne nuit, en s'en allant. . . . Il a dit deux ou trois fois, 'bonne nuit,' en s'en allant, comme s'il allait dormir," yet she had not heard his steps when he went.

And while they talk the sea murmurs

against the cliff and three of the women, who are old, pray.

So the scene opens, a tragedy of the vast game of Hoodman Blind Death plays with mankind. It is a tragedy of listening, of sounds to which the hearers hold no key of sight. It is a guess-work tragedy of vague surmising. The sound of waves—where? The sound of murmured prayers—who prays? The sound of falling leaves—what falls? The sound of rising wind, of night-birds' wings, the flight of migratory flocks? Question on question, none to answer. Doubt on doubt, and none to resolve those riddles, none to interpret. And the groping hands stretch out, the fingers are spread wide. And they touch the hard rock or are pierced by thorns. The senses take fright in that world of sightless disquiet, where each finds himself enveloped as it were in a bleak solitude of self: "Voilà des années que nous sommes ensemble, et nous ne nous sommes jamais aperçus. On dirait que nous sommes toujours seuls."

Fear grows apace in that obscure isolation, the dull fears of uncomprehended perils. From the avenues of sense yet open come betokenings of unknown import. The scent of trodden asphodels, the scent of the damp earth, and of the sodden and sere leaves, drift and cling in

the air. And the waves' murmur grows louder and a tempest gathers. Then comes the sound of hurrying steps, someone approaches "à petits pas, comme un petit enfant." Whose are the steps? It is "le chien de l'hospice!" and a cry of hope goes up:—

PREMIER AVEUGLE-NÉ. Il vient nous delivrer . . . il a suivi nos traces . . . il nous conduira. . . . Viens ici! viens ici! . . . Il nous conduira partout où nous voulons aller. . . . Il m'entraîne. . . . Suivez-moi! . . . Attendez! Qu'y a-t-il? Ah! J'ai touché quelque chose très froid. . . .

The dog has led him to where the dead priest lies; the blind hand touches the cold face, and the swift human instinct detects, even in the darkness of sightless eyes, the touch of death. "Il y a un mort entre nous."

The prayers of the women are suspended. Who is dead amongst them? Who is it that does not answer to the roll-call of their names? La Folle? But her neighbour answers for her, "Je l'entends vivre." All they yet live.

PREMIER AVEUGLE. Je crois . . . je crois que c'est le prêtre! Venez. . . .

And they come, his blind flock, feeling their way to his side; they crowd round him who had been as their eyes to the blind. And the women fall on their knees weeping, and the

cold increases, and the frost crisps the dead leaves, and the earth hardens, and the cluster of men and women tremble in the silence and chill of the night:—

LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. Je crois que quelqu'un vient vers nous.

TROISIÈME AVEUGLE-NÉ. Il ne viendra personne.

LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. J'entends marcher dans le lointain.

It is but the dead leaves that stir.

LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. J'entends marcher très loin de nous.

It is but the north wind rising.

LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. Je vous dis que quelqu'un vient vers nous.

To her alone amongst the blind that slow tread is audible—"un bruit de pas très lents." It is the step that comes towards all humanity. The snow has begun to fall, great laggard flakes floating through the frozen air. Sleep weighs on the limbs of men and women, the sleep of the snow. The steps draw nearer and nearer yet, and then they stop. "Ils sont ici. . . . Ils sont au milieu de nous! . . ." Whose are those footsteps? Wherefore do they halt? Who is it has sought them in the night and in the snow? A deliverer? A guide?

LA JEUNE AVEUGLE. Qui êtes vous ? (*Silence.*)
LA PLUS VIEILLE. Ayez pitié de nous ! . . . (*Silence.*)

And in the silence the wailing of the infant, the child of La Folle.

From *Les Aveugles* to the last of the death dramas, *Intérieur*, is a transition of very marked character. It is a passing from what is primarily an inspiration of terror to what is essentially an art of compassion. "L'événement masqué" is a death of which we are made aware by report alone. The theme of the play has, so to speak, unloosed itself, has disjoined itself, from the action and attaches itself solely to the emotional results. Nor is Maeterlinck here content to leave the persons most directly concerned with the unseen catastrophe anonymous. The Father, the Mother, the Sisters of the drowned girl, are likewise "personnages muets." They only appear seen through the three unshuttered garden-windows as they sit in the lighted chamber within. To that garden, shadowed by willow and cypress, come the sorrowful bearers of ill tidings, tidings which will shatter at one stroke all the serenity, the gentle happiness, of that tranquil home. "Je n'avais jamais vu de maison plus heureuse," the old friend who is

deputed to break the shock tells the passer-by, the death-witness, who reluctantly has accompanied him upon his errand. They two the first, others are to follow, each bringing the same message. Old age, manhood, youth, they collect together without, surveying, dismayed, that calm interior. And regarding the repose of hearts as yet unstricken, for whom the shaft of sorrow is already sped, the courage of those news-bringers fails:—

LE VIEILLARD. Il faut prendre de grandes précautions—le père est vieux et maladif . . . la mère aussi. . . . Et tous l'aimaient. . . .

L'ÉTRANGER. Pourquoi faut-il que je vous accompagne? Allez seul. . . . Je ne suis qu'un passant. . . .

But, alone or accompanied, the old man shrinks from the task. "Je ne sais pas pourquoi j'ai perdu tout courage. . . ." And, like an old man, his thoughts stray to vague reminiscences of the dead. He had met her that morning, that very morning; she had smiled as they smile who have no mind to speak what is in their heart; and her eyes were dim. . . . And one does not know . . . what does one know? She was perhaps of those who will not speak, and every man carries within him more than one reason for not living. . . . So, with many words, he

postpones the inevitable. Nevertheless the blow must fall. There had been many peasants in the river-meadows; they had come from the village, when the bad news spread; they were preparing a bier of branches; they will lay her on it; they will carry her hither. Marie and Marthe, the old man's grandchildren, had stayed beside the little dead girl, they will bring word when the funeral procession starts on its homeward way. Is it not best to wait? . . .

Marie enters: "Ils viennent, grandpère." They are coming, all the village has mustered to accompany the bearers; but they pray under their breath and the tapers are extinguished, lest the lights should advertise the catastrophe too soon. But—"Vous l'avez dit, grandpère?"

LE VIEILLARD. Vous voyez bien que nous n'avons rien dit. . . . Regardez, mon enfant, regardez! . . .

and Marie, too, gazes upon that Intérieur—so quiet that it would seem as though "those within listened to their souls' speech."

MARIE. Grandpère, ne le dites pas ce soir!

LE VIEILLARD. Vous voyez que vous perdez courage aussi. . . . Ils sont si sûrs de leur petite vie, et ils ne doute pas . . . que moi, pauvre vieux, je tiens ici, à deux pas de leur porte, tout leur petit

bonheur entre mes vieilles mains que je n'ose pas ouvrir.

With hushed voices and muffled footfall, groups of peasants steal into the enclosure, for they who bear the bier are even now close at hand. Marthe has come with them, she it has been who has bethought her of all that pity can do. She has laid the dead, as if asleep, upon the bier, has strewn it with daisies, has spread out the wet hair. And now her part is done; has grandpère done his? Is all ready, are they within forewarned? Her eyes search the lighted window. Perplexed she interrogates the old man: "Ils ne pleurent pas . . . ils . . ." Conviction dawns upon her . . . "vous ne l'avez pas dit?" Then as silence answers her question, she sets emotion aside with the impatience of youth. "C'est moi qui vais le dire." Yet she too delays . . . she looks again. Alas, for the sadness of it! . . . "Grandpère, je suis si malheureuse que je ne vous vois pas! . . . Moi-même, je ne sais plus que faire. . . ." And at long last it is he who enters the door while the two sisters, sobbing softly in the darkness, draw nearer to the window.

L'ÉTRANGER. Il l'a dit. . . .

In *L'Intruse*, in *Les Aveugles*, in *Intérieur*, the romantic element, with its symbolical royalties, has faded from sight. The playwright's use for crowns would appear to be over when man has set forth, to employ a Gaelic image, on the Journey of Truth. In *Intérieur* the village simplicities of life are before us—life and the pity of it, death and the shadow of death, not the horror, as in *La Mort de Tintagiles*, not the terror of death, as in *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles*, but the sorrow of it. And added to the theme is the insistent suggestion of that laggard unconsciousness of brain and sense-soul in prevision of those great events which the spirit-soul, by swift foreshadowings, does in some sort anticipate: "toutes choses arrivent en nous bien avant qu'elles aient lieu."

It is to this background of thought and idea that *Intérieur*, perhaps the most perfectly finished of Maeterlinck's dramatic scenes, owes a breadth of effect the later and longer plays are somewhat lacking in. It would seem as if here Maeterlinck had solved the great æsthetic problem of the fusion of the real with the imaginative. His divination of the invisible has not precluded, though it has modified, his perception of actual events, and the material facts are used as the starting-

point whence thought radiates into wider spheres from the finite to the infinite. His imagination serves for the extension of those facts by their transposition into realms where they act as factors in the conception of spiritually relative ideas, whose formation is determined, legitimately, by emotional and physical influences. In so doing he supplies an illustration and an example of the true imaginative genius which includes a dual vision, which sees indeed the sleeper, but sees likewise the dream.

Moreover, the emotional effect is never severed, as sometimes, from the source and root of emotion; and in making those upon whom the descent of sorrow is suspended "les personnages muets," he has by the most delicate of structural devices expressed something of the elemental silence of the "deepest griefs, which cut the heart-strings" but leave the lips dumb.

V

MONNA VANNA

RETURNING once more to the prefatory notes Maeterlinck has appended to the three volumes of his *Théâtre*, it is apparent that these may be taken in some sort as the sage's apologia for an æsthetic presentment of life where Maeterlinck as artist betrayed the cause of Maeterlinck as moralist. And undoubtedly for those of us whose faith allows that earth has her joys, instincts their health, hearts their not irrational gaiety, nature its healings, the senses their blameless pleasures, time its manifold mercies, hope its (incomplete) fulfilments; for those who see that green mosses overgrow every ruin, that even the blanks of life—those blanks which tell of joys lost, those more dimly outlined vacancies which tell of joys never possessed—are in due season obliterated and that years inevitably effect that gradual transformation whereby pain is atrophied into the memory of pain, the earlier of Maeterlinck's plays will always suggest the

reflection that if there may be such a place as a fool's paradise, there is no less certainly a corresponding locality—a wise man's hell.

And in his preface the apostle of emotional morality, awakened to the call of a conscience never wholly dumb in his works, with characteristic candour deprecates the monotonous, despondent pessimism of dramas where man appears only as a feeble puppet, a helpless prey to the hostility of vast adverse forces surrounding the frail oasis of human existence.

It is true that, even from the first, sympathy, as a creed of morals, with the assertion and the re-assertion of the supremacy of things spiritual over things material both in power and importance, are to be found in pages which portray "cette faiblesse immense et inutile." True that side by side with the poignant representation of hearts and lives predoomed to misery and death, he evokes, with an almost wistful anxiety, the spectacle of "quelques gestes de grâce et de tendresse, quelques paroles de douceur, d'espérance fragile, de pitié et d'amour," which those plays chronicle. But these occasional chequers of light proved insufficient to satisfy the demands for a less sombre outlook: "aujourd'hui cela ne me paraît plus suffisant." In the later plays he

has endeavoured, after a fashion of his own invention, to reconcile the claims of art and those claims of spiritual wisdom we may name —distinguishing it from the formalities of conventional and social decalogues—ethical morality: "Je ne crois pas qu'un poème doive sacrifier sa beauté à un enseignement moral, mais si, tout en ne perdant rien de ce que l'orne au dedans comme au dehors, il nous mène à des vérités aussi admissibles mais plus encourageantes que la vérité qui mène à rien, il aura l'avantage d'accomplir un double devoir incertain. . . . Essayons . . . de varier l'apparence de l'inconnue qui nous entoure et d'y découvrir une raison nouvelle de vivre et de persévérer," so that regarding facts with a sober appreciation of the uncertainties of sorrow no less than of the insecurities of joy, we may at least learn somewhat: "nous y gagnerons du moins d'alterner nos tristesses en les mélant d'espoirs qui s'éteignent et se rallument."

Here, as elsewhere, Maeterlinck is not afraid to allow that if his words have power to incline men towards the "invisible goodness" which, according to his later creed, underlies the outward ill, to dispose them to a gentler tolerance of human defects and to a wiser acquiescence in the secret issues of earth-existence, it is not

a matter of indifference to him. Never does he repudiate, even from the æsthetic standpoint, the responsibility of his calling. Genius is, for him, the keeper to whose charge the lesser spirits of his brethren are committed, and his genius has the courage of its acknowledged task.

Further, he has clearly defined the obligations of the dramatist, as he conceives of them, with the limitations incident to the playwright's art. The lyric poet may remain in some sort a theorist of the unknown. The lyrist may dwell, if it please him, in the realms of abstract ideas; he is not compelled to apply them to practical conclusions. So long as he conveys to us the sentiment and impression of the infinite mysteries that surround our little star-dust life, he will have attained the emotional effect lyric art in its highest aspirations achieves. "The dramatist cannot limit himself to such generalisations." He is compelled to transpose into real life, into the life lived day by day, the idea he has fashioned for himself of the unknown: "il est obligé de faire descendre dans la vie réelle, dans la vie de tous les jours, l'idée qu'il se fait de l'inconnue."

In this final phrase he would seem to indicate with exactitude the source of the personal stamp which his individuality of outlook, his

idiosyncrasies of temperament, have printed upon one and all of his productions, and it is the continuous attempt to embody his own finite idea of the immense and infinite unknown that colours and dyes the pages where he depicts the daily, or the undaily, life of the men and women of his stage.

Read with this key to the artist's deliberate intention, the later plays are closely linked with the essays whose publication they followed, where the medium of exposition is that cadenced prose which it is the despair of even his most accomplished translators to reproduce.

Monna Vanna [1902] is a milestone evidencing how far already the dramatist of *Maleine* has travelled upon the road trodden by the moralist of *La Sagesse et la Destinée.*

The change is radical in every respect. Personalities with distinct characterisation supplant the type figures of his early dramas. The atmosphere has lost its haze, the grey-tinted mist has lifted its veil. The filmy glass cupolas of *Serres Chaudes* are shattered. We have emerged from the world of symbols, from a world where shadows cast their similitudes of substance upon the air. Events have divested themselves of their masks, so far as events which have for arena of action the human heart and soul can discard their

inevitable disguises. Further, those events no longer, or in far lesser measure, are suggestive of "les événements idéaux," passing, correlatively, upon the parallel spiritual planes of Novalis's doctrine of the duality of existences. And a yet more fundamental alteration of mental attitude is witnessed to by the substitution of will for destiny. Fate has retired more or less behind the scenes where men's wills and men's actions appear in its stead as determining forces upon whose clash and conflict the dramatic situations depend. Heroes and heroines, in such measure as may be, subordinate doom to volition, fatality is no longer invincible, and, in Novalis's words, character *becomes* destiny.

In accordance with this new ethical scheme youth no longer occupies the forefront in his art. Childhood disappears. For the type of *l'enfant-femme*, of the child-automaton, moved hither and thither by the wind of destiny, the child-serf of passion who worships but one god and him only serves, is substituted the figure of a woman whose actions are premeditated, voluntary, deliberate, of a woman who has entered into her own kingdom of ideas, the violence of whose primitive instincts is appeased, whose heart recognises other lordships than love and the

sovereignty of other claims than the impulses of passion.

Taken in the abstract, the theme of *Monna Vanna*—a story of which the outline might belong to a sixteenth-century *novelle*—under Maeterlinck's treatment becomes in substance a duel of rival idealisms. The incidents of the play, as they affect the fortunes of the main personages, are the legitimate issues, the direct results, of two practically antagonistic ideals carried to their logical consequences in actual life—the life lived day by day—of Maeterlinck's æsthetic formula.

The plot is structurally simple. Florentine mercenaries are besieging Pisa. The resources of the beleaguered city are exhausted, the inhabitants are reduced to their last straits. When the scene opens the city is about to become the helpless prey of its assailants. Guido Colonna commands the Pisan garrison. Prinzivalle, a Venetian adventurer, is the condottieri captain of the Florentine forces. Marco Colonna, father to Guido, old, wise, and prudent, has been deputed to treat with the enemy for the surrender of the city, and, if so it were possible, to save its citizens from the indiscriminate massacre threatened. Marco has brought back to Guido the astounding proposition made to him by the hostile com-

mander. Florence, Prinzivalle had stated, had secretly resolved upon the disgrace of her too successful captain. Possessed of the knowledge of his impending ruin, Prinzivalle conceives himself at liberty to renounce his obligation to Florence and to act upon his own initiative. He is ready to avert the sanguinary destruction of the city. While the report of his disgrace is still unrumoured in the camp, his authority over his soldiery is absolute. He volunteers that the lives of these 80,000 Pisans shall be secured from death and outrage, that the starving town shall be reprovisioned before cock-crow. But he imposes a condition, a solitary condition. Monna Vanna, the wife of the Pisan commander, must consent, of her own free assent, to pass the night alone with him in his tent without the city ramparts.

Thus stated by Marco to Guido Colonna, the situation works itself out in details which add little to its interest. For the intrinsic interest lies, not in any or all of the details and developments, but in the contest, at once presented to the reader, during the dialogue between Marco the philosopher and Guido the soldier, of two ideals of right, of two standards of duty. It is a combat to the death.

For Marco, champion of a transcendental morality, it is expedient that one woman

should sacrifice herself and that a whole city should be saved. It is expedient that Vanna, and with her Guido, and himself, Marco, to whose old age she is the beloved daughter, should suffer sorrow and shame, and that Pisa should be preserved from slaughter and ravishment. To Marco's conscience the sacrifice demanded is the higher heroism, the supersaintship of supreme virtue: "l'acte le plus héroique est l'acte le plus pénible," is his axiom. Such is the moral standard espoused by the idealist, who, we conjecture, expresses more or less the personal sentiments of the dramatist.

But Guido Colonna is likewise an idealist. He is a fanatic who upholds another flag, nor is he less rooted in his faith than Marco; he sees but one path and in it he walks. For him, the man of simpler clay, the chivalrous soldier whose instincts, prejudices, convictions, are moulded by the traditional codes of less complex creeds, it is better that a whole universe of cities, such as Pisa, perish by force of arms, than that, of deliberate consent, one woman should for one hour sell that which it is for love alone to give as it is for love alone to receive. The immensity of the gain, the overwhelming tribulation to be averted, by the payment of that one hour's surrender, does not for one moment weigh in the balance of his

choice. The soldier's uncompromising repudiation of the sordid bargain is absolute and unswerving.

He stands alone, one against all. Each and every man, the advocates of that contrary ideal, muster to bear witness to the blindness of his folly. Marco first, with his doctrines of mystic illumination: "des clartés plus grandes," promulgated with the authority of spiritual initiation into the mysteries of the soul. He has learnt secrets that Guido, the devotee of outward honour, ignores. These secrets Marco has not hitherto imparted even to his well-loved son, who now misapprehends his action and his thoughts, based as they are upon that inner science of "la morale mystique." "Lorsque la vieillesse est venue, je ne vous fit point part de ce qu'elle m'apprenait chaque jour sur la vie, sur l'amour, sur la douleur et le bonheur des hommes . . . Si je vous avais dit plus tôt tout ce qui changeait en mon cœur, toutes les vanités qui s'en détachaient, toutes les réalités qui s'ouvraient à leur place, je ne me trouverais pas aujourd'hui devant vous comme un malheureux inconnu que vous êtes sur le point de haïr. . . ."

In vain that tardy exposition of interior wisdom. Its arguments fall upon deaf ears.

After Marco, the upholders of his cause and of

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their own, comes the massed opinion of the world of the rich, of the *seigneurie* of Pisa; men of mark, men of noble birth and honourable repute. They acclaim with one voice the sanctity of the ransom by which the many are redeemed. Guido's scorn scarcely debases itself to the level of their merchant-thoughts. With the *seigneurie* the citizens, the world of the poor, the starving crowd of hungry men and famine-stricken women. They, too, with the instinct of classic legend, which chained Andromeda to the rock and delivered Sabra to the dragon, see in the deed the holiness of a sacrifice which brings bread to the lips of their children and wards their little necessitous existences from the scourge of war. For pity of their distress willingly would Guido have resigned wealth, life itself. But save them he may not, for the price of their salvation is an ideal. Dimly, for he at least is no man of words and reasons, dimly he apprehends that principles are greater things than life, that ideas are of more worth than cities, that to relinquish a standard of honour were a worse loss to the human race than to yield ten score of Pisas to the enemy. No glorification of sacrifice, no persuasion howsoever disinterested and impassioned, can stir him in his decision, can shake his faith in the chivalries of past

centuries which counts the world well lost so Vanna—so, we may believe, the least beggar wife of the market-place—keep undesecrated her wife- and womanhood.

Arrayed against him Marco, the *seigneurie*, the populace and—Vanna. She comes, the white Madonna of Guido's life and love and faith. With the incredulity of love he hears her resolve:—

VANNA. J'irai ce soir au camp de Prinzivalle.

GUIDO. Pour te donner à lui comme il l'a demandé? . . .

VANNA. Oui.

She goes. By force he will not, by entreaty he cannot, deter her. And she passes from his sight, she goes upon her way to give what is not hers to give, to violate the old human sanctities of sacramental promise, to—the ancient fallacy repeats itself—to do evil that good may ensue. On these foundations Vanna has created her new ideal with the calm abnegation of a consecrated victim.

So the first act develops its world-wide tragedy, the tragedy that pursues not the wrongdoers who sin against their consciousness of good, but the rightdoers whose consciences uplift hostile standards.

Pisa is saved. Moreover, in the Venetian

mercenary Vanna has found her old adoring playmate of childish days, and while the waggons laden with provisions are dispatched to succour the citizens, Vanna remains within Prinzivalle's tent secure in the reverent worship of a passion whose generosities are infinite. But already the emissaries of Florence seek him. He must fly—his life is forfeit. Whither can he fly ? Where find a refuge ? All Tuscany is on the watch, spies are stationed at every turn—Vedio has come to warn his master of the menacing peril. Then Vanna speaks.

VANNA (to PRINZIVALLE). . . . Tu viens de sauver Pise ; il est juste qu'elle te sauve. . . . Tu y viens sous ma garde et je reponds de toi.

And as from his tent she views the joy-fires that flame upon Pisa's dome, proclaiming Pisa's deliverance, Vanna too gives utterance to her joy :—

Ah, je suis trop heureuse et deux fois trop heureuse en face de ce bonheur que je dois à celui qui m'a le mieux aimé. . . . Viens, mon Gianello (lui donnant un baiser sur le front). Voici le seul baiser que je puisse te donner. . . .

The third and last acts show how Monna Vanna's unconsummated sacrifice has resolved itself into new obligations. She returns unscathed from Prinzivalle's hands. Prinzivalle

remains guiltless of offence. Nevertheless, a price which neither Vanna nor Marco contemplated must be paid.

As the dawn rises over the saved city, Guido, unmoved in his fierce repudiation of the sacrilege of honour, awaits Vanna's return. He has withheld his hand, has allowed Vanna the liberty of her choice, has suffered the city to profit by the bargain she has sealed with her sacrifice. Now the night is over, the profanation of all that life holds holy has been presumably accomplished. It is his again to order the course of events, to retrieve what may be retrieved of the irreparable infamy imposed upon him. Marco's fluent wisdom, as before, is impotent :—

GUIDO. . . . Attendre, patienter, accepter, oublier, pardonner et pleurer !

Not so. That which he, the soldier, has to do is simple :—

GUIDO. Un homme a pris Vanna. Vanna n'est plus à moi tant que cet homme existe.

Pisa has eaten and drunken of the loaves and the wine she has purchased at so dear a price. For Guido there is but one thing remaining—revenge.

As from the first, Guido stands alone, the tragic fool of honour. Below, a city, frenzied

with joy, greets the return of its deliverer. Her progress is a triumph; radiant, "elle éclaire la foule qui l'acclame," as she passes through the streets. She mounts the flight of steps that lead to what was once her home. The stairs are strewn with flowers beneath her feet. She falls in Marco's arms:—

MARCO. Monte, monte, Vanna, plus belle que Judith, et plus pure que Lucrèce.

VANNA. Mon père, je suis heureuse. . . .

MARCO. . . . Te voici plus radieuse que si tu revenais des sources de ce ciel qui chante ton retour. . . .

Guido, cries the sage, will surely pardon "ta magnifique faute. . . ."

Guido is face to face with his fallen Madonna. The radiance of her joy lightens no shadow of his darkness:—

GUIDO (to the crowd). Laissez-nous.

VANNA. Non, non, attendez tous. . . . Guido, tu ne sais pas. . . . Je veux le dire, je veux bien dire à tous. . . . Guido, je reviens pure.

In vain she asseverates her innocence. No least shaft of hope can penetrate Guido's anguished heart. Fiercely he bids the crowd, the astonished crowd, withdraw, and they fall back, all save one—the stranger who with hidden face stands by Vanna's side. Let him go hence,

this stranger who thrusts himself into Guido's presence. Vanna throws herself between the two men. Her confused sentences make clear to Guido that his enemy, Prinzivalle himself, confronts him. To his maddened brain one only explanation attaches itself to her words. She has decoyed Prinzivalle, ensnared him with her beauty, as Judith Holofernes; she has lured her ravisher hither with her caresses to receive at Guido's hands the just recompense of his crime. If this be so, now indeed can Guido pardon her, now indeed may he take her back to his arms, and the stain shall be washed away and the past blotted out in the blood of the offender:—

VANNA. . . . Il ne m'a pas touchée . . . je sors de sa tente comme je serais sortie de la maison d'un frère.

GUIDO. Pourquoi ?

VANNA. Parce qu'il m'aime.

Then the pent-up volcano of Guido's incredulous rage discharges itself. Let all the crowd approach. Let all who will hear. Does this woman speak truth ? who can believe ? The silence of the crowd replies. Now it is Vanna who stands alone; save for one soul whose faith is great:—

MARCO. Je le crois.

He, he only, believes her word, for the invisible goodness of man does not lie for him outside the region of the possible.

But it is the crowd whom Guido calls to the seat of judgment:—

GUIDO. Vous voyez cette femme et vous voyez cet homme ? . . . Il est certain qu'ils s'aiment. . . . Ils sortiront d'ici . . . sans outrage, sans subir aucun mal . . . pourvu que cette femme me dise la vérité, qui est la seule possible et qui est la seule chose que j'aime encore en elle. . . .

VANNA. J'ai dit la vérité. . . . Il ne m'a pas touchée. . . .

GUIDO. C'est bien, vous l'avez dit—vous l'avez condamné.

To save Pisa Vanna was prepared to pay the price of sacramental unfaith. To save Prinzivalle she is willing to pay the price of perjury. The final scene is one of bewildered violence and conflict. If her innocence cannot avail, let her guilt—the guilt which is not hers—buy Prinzivalle's life. She claims him as her prisoner—she accepts the imputation of her stain—she clamours for vengeance—a vengeance her own hand shall exact. She heaps falsehood on falsehood. Guido is convinced; where he discredited truth, he believes a lie. Truth had challenged disbelief,

falsehood wins triumphantly the day. We see Prinzivalle led hence to a prison of which Guido confides the key to Vanna. The end of the story we are left to divine. We hear Guido's words of absolution and trust:—

GUIDO. Ma Vanna. . . . Je n'ai jamais douté. . . . Maintenant c'est fini, et tout va s'oublier dans la bonne vengeance. . . .

VANNA. . . . Mais donnez moi la clé . . . la clé de sa prison. . . .

We hear Marco's murmur:

MARCO. J'ai compris, Vanna. . . . J'ai compris ton mensonge. . . . Tu as fait l'impossible. . . . C'est juste et très injuste, comme tout ce que l'on fait. Et la vie a raison. . . . Il faut mentir encore, puisqu'on ne nous croit pas. . . .

And we seem, listening to the sage's acquiescence in falsehood, to catch an echo of the moralist's assertion—inscribed elsewhere—that it is not in heroic deflections from the path, but in obedience to the humble simplicities of duty, that for the most part the highest idealism may find its earthly fulfilment.

VI

LATER DRAMAS

With *Joyzelle* [1908] the chronological order seems to contradict the phases of literary development unless it be regarded as a temporary regression to earlier methods. For in its imaginative aspect, if not in the characterisation of the personages of the romance, it occupies a middle place and to some extent bridges over the abrupt transition from the twilight atmosphere of fantastic symbolism to that of the open daylight of unsymbolic action.

Shakespearean influences here revive, mingled with reminiscences of medieval legend. The scene, as in "The Tempest," is an island of enchanted seas and shores. There abides the lord of the island, the melancholy wizard sage, Merlin, less sagacious than Prospero in worldly counsel, wiser than Prospero in spiritual and divine illumination, Prospero's equal in the exercise of magic spells. He is a Merlin overshadowed by the doom which awaits him, if so be that no purer love of

woman shield his heart from the Vivienne snare in the far forest glade of Broceliarde.

The purpose of Merlin, no less than that of Prospero—to pursue an analogy which is in no wise a plagiarism—is the union of two predestined lovers. We have, on the one hand, Prospero effecting the meeting of Miranda, his daughter, with Ferdinand, the shipwrecked Prince, on the other Merlin supervising the loves of Lanceor, his son, with Joyzelle, the shipwrecked heroine. Both parental enchanters subject the lovers to trials designed to test the strength and purity of their passion. Both evoke the aid of phantasmal illusions, and in the practice of the necromancer's art evoke, waking, the phantasmagorias of which dreams are made. Further, the spirit, here feminised, in whom Merlin's super-normal foresight, his super-normal powers, are enphantomed, and who fulfils with surplusage of love and devotion the offices of Prospero's light-hearted servitor, is christened after the very name of her Shakespearean brother, Arielle.

Thus far and no farther is the gay fantasy of "The Tempest" echoed in the painful little drama where Merlin, seeing in Joyzelle the possibility of a love which could alone inoculate him from the poison-working passion that lies ambushed for his future undoing, renounces

his hope of redemption. That Lanceor may live, love and be loved, Merlin forfeits, for ever, the deliverance that might be his.

No undercurrent of mirth, no grotesques of men or monsters, break the thread of the story. Arielle herself is an Arielle of a world grown old, she is no longer a capricious fairy sprite, captive to a master-will. She is the ethereal form of Merlin's spiritual power: "ma force intérieure, la puissance oubliée qui sommeille en toute âme." She is the indwelling soul that the soul of each human being enshrines, exteriorised; she is his foreknowledge, she is the diviner whose vision pierces, though incompletely, the veil of the future. It is she to whose prescience is revealed that Lanceor's life is at stake should Joyzelle's love fail in the coming ordeal:—

ARIELLE. Si la flamme n'atteint pas les limites de la flamme . . . c'est la mort qui l'emporte. . . .

Nevertheless, Arielle is also the tempter. Let Merlin consider well the long suffering of the living death that awaits him in the years to be. Still there is time to avert it; in winning Joyzelle the burthen of his doom will be lifted. He will keep his power, his wisdom, his vital force:—

ARIELLE. Maître, je t'en supplie, et pour toi et

pour moi qui aime tant la lumière et la perds avec toi. . . . Choisis, choisis la vie !

MERLIN. Va-t'en, va-t'en, te dis-je.

And alone, bending above the sleeping Joyzelle, he renounces love, renounces peace.

MERLIN. Ah ! quand on tient ainsi dans les mains son bonheur et celui d'un autre homme . . . c'est alors que la vie pousse un cri surhumain pour se faire écouter et défendre ses droits. . . . Mais c'est alors aussi qu'il faut prêter l'oreille à l'autre voix qui parle, qui n'a rien à nous dire de précis ni de sûr, qui n'a rien à promettre . . . de la petite voix qui n'a rien à me dire mais qui seule a raison. . . .

So the lovers' ordeals are prepared. Love must pass over the red-hot ploughshares with naked feet. We are confronted, as it were, with a destiny which has thrown down its glove to a human heart. If that human heart flinch, destiny will exact the uttermost farthing. And it is on the working out of the challenge that the action of the play hinges.

In his endeavour to persuade the reader of some element of uncertainty in the result Maeterlinck diverges from the pure fatalism of his previous dramas. Merlin awaits the issue of events with anxious suspense. But the effort to infect us with any kindred doubts proves ineffective. Never, for one single

moment, can we conceive of Joyzelle as other than the Bayard heroine, *sans peur et sans reproche.* The temptations that beset the path of the lovers are the temptations of deception and illusion—St. Anthony visions of ill. They rise from without, there are no traitors within the citadel of the soul to conspire with them for love's betrayal. Lanceor's unfaith is but the snare laid of an hallucination; he is a puppet whose dormant will is momentarily swayed by a resistless power. And the interest of the situations that arise concentrates itself upon the fluctuating emotional currents that carry Merlin, the mournful arbiter of their happiness, with all his human weaknesses, towards his ultimate goal.

For it would almost seem as if unconsciously the dramatist has fallen under the spell of the haunting quality with which Celtic imagination invested the figure of that child of the devil, born of the royal nun, born in the dusk of shame and sadness, to stand forever aloof from his fellows:—

MERLIN. Je suis le génie qu'il faut fuir.

An alien figure amid Arthurian chivalries of lustihead and hardihood, amid men of good courage and simple hearts, of primitive passions unsubdued, if half consecrated, by mystic

ideals; men of vigorous physical vitality unconsciously engaged in single combat with an ascetic creed, Merlin passes with melancholy laughter and seeing eyes. Under the semblance of a seven-years' child counselling Vortigern to the destruction of the red dragon or the white, or riding at Arthur's side as friend with friend, in the stature of a man, the past, the present, and the future alike weigh on the seer's shoulders with the triple burthen of experience, insight, and foresight. In a world where Arthur and Guenever and Launcelot go Maying and the greenwood is merry with the huntsman's horn, in a world where the Grail vision pierces Launcelot's heart with its divine anguish, where the youth-time of human nature found its playground and its cemetery —there Merlin watches, by the feasting and the grave, the lonely wizard of age and of disillusion.

And in echoes, in reflections, Merlin has traversed the literature of Europe. In French literature his romance is written in the "Roman de Merlin." In folk-lore he wanders, seeking the red egg of the sea snake, *l'herbe d'or*, the bitter hyssop of the hedge, the green cress in the stream, and the pearl-berried mistletoe in the forest. Geoffrey of Monmouth portrays him occupied in the transport

of the Devil's Dana stones from Killaraus, "a mountain in Ireland," to Salisbury plain. He is the "savio mago" of Ariosto, entombed with dead body and living spirit; he is the master-enchanter of Spenser. But wheresoever he walks, and howsoever he is portrayed, always, always he vanishes from our sight under the grey hawthorn of betrayal, laying his sleeping life in the hands of her whom he has loved. For Vivienne is always there.

ARIELLE. Maître, je la vois . . . elle t'enlace de ses bras qui parodient l'amour, elle te prend ta puissance, ta raison, ta sagesse; elle t'arrache enfin le secret de ta force; et comme un vieillard ivre tu tombe sur le sol. . . . Alors elle te dépouille, te raille, se redresse et referme sur nous la caverne mortelle qui ne s'ouvrira plus. . . .

Of Maeterlinck's lesser dramatic works there followed the fantastic comedy of *Ardiane*, where the Bluebeard legend reappears in a novel guise, and that other legend-romance of *Sœur Béatrice*, the story which in ballads and plays, as in Davidson's "Ballade of a Nun," as in "The Miracle" of Humperdinck's music, has won a curious popularity. Including these in the collected edition of his dramas Maeterlinck

has also defined the place he would assign to them as examples of his art :—

> Quant au deux petites pièces qui suivent . . . *Ardiane* et *Barbe-Bleue, ou la délivrance inutile*, et *Sœur Béatrice*, je voudrais qu'il n'y eût aucun mal entendu à leur endroit. . . . Ce sont à proprement parler, de petits jeux de scène, de courts poèmes du genre assez malheureusement appelé "opéra-comique" destinés à fournir aux musiciens qui les avaient demandés, un thème convenable à des développements lyriques. Ils ne prétendent à rien davantage. . . .

They are, in truth, absolutely devoid of serious effort, æsthetic, doctrinal, or moral. Their interest and their merits are the interest and the merit which must always be attached even to compositions of minor importance when they come spontaneously from the pen of a master of literary art.

Perhaps something of the same criticism might be offered of a work whose extreme popularity has been one of those freaks of enthusiasm to which the world of theatre-goers is subject. *The Blue Bird* [1909] is one of those imaginative works whose birth seems timed to coincide with certain corresponding currents of feeling and sympathy, works that supply utterance to what was inarticulate and illustrate in vivid images the semi-conscious thought

whose kinship is rather with the human emotions than with the human intelligence.

The apparent spontaneity, the almost, it would appear, haphazard construction of what is, all in one, a fairy tale, a morality and a mystery play, written with a lightness of touch and conceived with a lightness of fancy none other of Maeterlinck's dramas possess, captivated its audience, as it were, by surprise. It touched with a wand of charm the childhood that lies at the heart of age and bade it requicken. It touched youth with a dream where gleams of mystic doctrine, shot with quick heart-beats of human sympathy, bade youth extend its short visions of life and look on either side beyond the barriers. And in scenes of drifting loveliness, where fantastic grotesques give their note of pantomime to the stage, the gentle fairyland of dreams the conjurer has evoked becomes one with the land of the soul's vision evoked by the sage.

It is more difficult to speak critically of the last published of Maeterlinck's dramas, *Marie Madeleine.*

Sometimes it would seem as if themes founded on Gospel narrative carried in themselves an element of literary failure, unless, as in folk-lore renderings, in Noëls and Weihnachts-

lieder, the consecrated story is translated by an un-selfconscious impulse of a naïf religious sentiment.

The cause of failure does not lend itself easily to analysis. It may be that the autocratic tendency of religious tradition to fix a consistent, permanent, and definite type, to crystallise its imaginative visualisation of past scenes, bars the way to any reframing of the picture, to any recasting of gesture or feature. It may be that gesture and feature have been so insistently stereotyped by centuries that no new handling can at will efface the long inheritance of impressions stamped upon the subconscious vision, without, however reverent the intention, however skilful the execution, inducing an effect of studied artificiality fatal to æsthetic excellence.

There may be, possibly, a more emotional obstacle for the artist to contend with. The world, like the individual human unit, lives many simultaneous lives. There is the life material, the life sensual, the spiritual, the rational life. And not less potent than the material, sensual, rational, or spiritual, because often submerged, the world lives collectively what we name, in its non-ecclesiastical sense, the religious life. And by the religious life is signified (to confine the term to its exact limits)

that minor portion of the interior and spiritual life which has attached itself, with affections made up of a whole medley of associated joys, hopes, sins and repentances, to certain beliefs. These beliefs include the all-supreme master-faith in man's personal relationship with divine personalities.

For the Western world that religious life, whether active or dormant, conscious and confessed, or relegated to the regions of lost faiths and discarded superstitions, has been for nineteen centuries permeated by visualised conceptions of the Christian creed, conceptions emphasised both by pictorial art and by the semi-dramatic ceremonies of the Christian Church. Intellectually, and in the life of the world material and rational, men may have liberated reason from the bonds of doctrine. Reason confronts reason, and where one succumbs the other triumphs. The reason of faith fights on the same plane as the reason of unfaith, the quixote in armour of yesterday gives place to the philosopher armed with science of to-day. But reason covers little space in the broad field of human existence. There are influences entrenched within a citadel where the foot of reason cannot tread, and unfaith still, in the memorable image of Ernest Renan, hears the sound of the sanctus bells

which ring in the city under the sea. To those forces belong the emotional instincts inseparable from the religious life, the unrational affections that, throughout even the most rational of existences, follow the leading of some unknown guidance, affections that are drawn by invisible magnets, here to the pursuit of an ignis-fatuus, there to the beacon of a secure haven.

These affections survive in large measure for many a generation the decay of intellectual assent to traditional authority. It is, to judge from appearances, a lighter task for the brain of the world to set aside the Christ who loved the world than for the heart of the world to set aside the Christ it had loved, for it is not the lover but the loved, it is not the gift received but the gift rendered, that prints its brand upon the emotional life of both the individual and humankind. Moreover, no evolution of knowledge, no progress of science, enters the fastness where the heart guards its own. "The heart has reasons that the reason knows not of," and for the emotional instincts centuries pass in vain. They are the bird-songs of the earth; as men grieved, hoped, despaired, loved, so, too, they love, sorrow, hope, despair to-day. And this being so, handed down from generation to generation

the religious life, which in old time absorbed into itself so many of those affections (and those the most intimate) has assimilated with them some of their emotional qualities. It has acquired the tenacity of their deep-rooted hold upon human nature, the quickening vitality that manifests itself in sudden irresponsible enthusiasms of fanatic and devotee. Above all it has absorbed a quality essentially allied with affections—the jealousy that resents the entrance even of the unsandalled foot within the threshold of its shrine. And this, albeit the rational life, the reason of the world, may pronounce that the altar is bare and the tabernacle vacant.

And that shrine which the heart of the Western world has consecrated is peopled with many figures. Cross and Crèche hold each their mystery of birth and death made sacred in the Divine adoption of them. The walls are a shifting scenery of vineyard and cedar grove, of olive gardens and cornfields and of those blue Galilean waters where, as Renan, many a saddened pilgrim of these later days, following the life-narrative of Him in whose name the land was christened "holy," has

Tracked His footsteps on the shore
To lose them on the sea.

But whether those footsteps be lost or unlost that emotional jealousy still stands sentinel at the door, and it behoves the artist to ask himself if the password is known to him before he would penetrate the sanctuary.

And amongst the shifting figures frescoed upon the stones of that temple of the heart, stand the figures of those whose names are inscribed in the list of Maeterlinck's dramatis personæ, the Maries, Lazarus, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus. Each name is charged with reminiscences and associations, and one and all rise up prepared to challenge, like the spirit of the dead prophet, the evocation which troubles their rest. And the voice—upon whose utterances the action and events of the drama turn, albeit the speaker remains always invisible to the outward eye—speaks in words and sentences which centuries have listened to upon their knees.

As M. Rostand before him in "La Samaritaine," Maeterlinck has undertaken to expand and develop realistically imagined incidents and possibilities of a nature that, had such incidents existed, the authors of the old narrative, with their reticence, their serene indifference to side issues, would have passed by unchronicled.

In this expansion and addition of detail, in

the amplification of episode and dialogue, we seem to lose the wider significance—the universality—of those broken, fragmentary sentences of gospel story which have echoed down the years with a more vivid reality than any art can impart, sentences possessed of a reality, a force, a brevity and concentration, that would seem to prohibit paraphrase. Above all, and Maeterlinck more than most should appraise the greatness of the loss, we lose the *silences* of those pages, sealed by time with a stone no resurrection angel can roll away from the dumb sepulchre of the past.

Maeterlinck has adopted the wholly arbitrary tradition which identifies Mary of Magdala with the penitent sinner who loved much. But no dramatic violence of uttered passion will bear import so fraught with emotional feeling as the brief record of broken alabaster, of the mute tears that fell upon the feet of the Divine Wanderer, of the mute anguish of her who stood at noon beholding the Cross and who at dawn was early at the grave. Nor can any enumeration, name by name, of those sad souls whose courage failed them in the hour of peril, do otherwise than contract and restrict the infinitely tragic suggestion with which the anonymity of one short sentence is weighted—"they all"—and all we surely

with them, whose hearts have ever swerved from the Call of the Divine—"they all" forsook Him and fled.

For the rest, the crisis of the drama lies outside both gospel, legend, and tradition. It repeats the crisis of Joyzelle's ordeal; it is likewise a repetition of the situation constituting the leading motive in *Monna Vanna*. To ransom a city—80,000 lives—Vanna is prepared (and justified in the esteem of the idealist) to offer the sacrifice Prinzivalle demands. Joyzelle, to save one single life—the life of her lover—refuses the alternative Merlin, for the testing of her love, proffers. The Magdalen of the drama rejects a like temptation, albeit the life to save is Christ's.

In these three women of varied characterisation, Vanna, the spotless wife, set in the frame of an Italian renaissance *novelle;* Joyzelle, the blameless virgin, associated with the Merlin figure of medieval romance; Magdalen, the penitent of sacred classic; on whose several acceptances or rejections of the overtures fate makes, on whose choice and volition, rest the emotional catastrophes of the situations destiny presents, we may be supposed to read an interpretation of the individualised heroine-hood with which Maeterlinck has replaced the type figures, the Maleines, the Mélisandes, of earlier

date. The *maladive* charm of *l'enfant-femme* has departed, and with it the haunting, pitiful grace of those pale children of emotion whose presence upon his stage gave to his art an almost unique æsthetic value. Has—the question arises of necessity—has his art gained or lost in the substitution of maturity for youth, of volition for destiny, of the womanhood of action and will for the sleep-walking childhood of passion-ruled marionettes? And with the transition from the mist-veiled atmosphere of those dramas of more purely imaginative texture, with the withdrawal of these illusive, fragile type-figures who traversed a gauze-filmed stage with silent feet, have we not lost the special note of individuality in Maeterlinck's genius for which the clearer characterisation of personages, the clearer realisations of the "life lived day by day" offers no wholly adequate compensations?

VII

MYSTICISM

To some amongst us it would seem that not a few of the advance guard of ethical writers are occupied mainly with the rediscovery of certain moral principles of which the stereotyped acceptance by an official conventional morality has obscured the divine and human truth.

The eye, by too long looking upon an object, diminishes its perceptive vision; emotion too long concentrated blunts its edge; sensations too acutely stimulated at one point are atrophied, and what Pater, in one of his happiest phrases, called "the veil of the familiar" falls between man and his affections, his delights, his joys. So, too, a veil falls between humanity and its great ideals, its creeds and worships. Religions recognised, in the sphere of things divine, this insidious dulling by habit and custom of the soul's impulses. To relax without diverting the spirit from the contemplation of God was the aim of ritual observances, of

ritual ceremonies. These distracted the thoughts and senses from their spiritual centre only to reconduct them, refreshed and re-invigorated, back to religion's inmost shrine. Like carrier pigeons they bore the impress of the divine into the regions of the world of sense and sight; like carrier pigeons they homed their way back to the unseen throne, freighted with the response of things visible, temporal, and sensible, to the divine evocation.

But with the passing of years, rites and ceremonies themselves lost, by that same law of familiarity, their power. The process may be retarded, it is never obviated, and no drag-chain anchors the wheel of time. The great ideas which in their first mintage, by this or that religious movement, focussed the attention of the soul, demand, it would seem almost of necessity, a reissue, and with the reissue new formulas, new accessories, come into requisition.

Then it is that interpreters arise to interpret anew the old mysteries discarded faiths embodied: "il est bien rare qu'un mystère disparaisse; d'ordinaire il ne fait que changer de place." The transference exacts perforce restatements, and a readjustment of mental position. Moreover, if there are to be no plagiarisms of dead centuries which, striving

artificially to restore the spiritual fabric of the past, obliterate it, that shifting of the mystery necessitates a revival of the searching, questing spirit which of old drove humanity forth into the desert to see if it were but a reed shaken by a wind.

It is perhaps by virtue of that spirit, whose presence asserts itself imperatively in Maeterlinck's essays, that they have found wide acceptance even by an English audience, to whom the doctrines and sentiments of his forbears—Ruysbroeck l'Admirable, and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis)—are alien both as modes of thought and as modes of feeling.

By virtue of another element in his works Maeterlinck as essayist has been the accredited exponent of what is, somewhat too comprehensively, denominated modern mysticism.

Possibly to define mysticism is a work of supererogation; the term expands or contracts according to the intention of the user of it. Nor have many abstract terms been employed with wider elasticity of meaning to cover more diverse qualities. On the one hand mysticism has been identified with the crudest supernaturalism, old and new. In another aspect it has been ascribed to symbolism in its most indiscriminate methods. But the

supernatural is not inherently mystical, and symbolism is often little more than the exposition of wholly non-mystic conceptions by the arbitrary selection of a metaphorical cipher. Supernaturalism, whether of the miracle-worker, the necromancer, or the modern spiritualist, depends upon the intervention of preternatural, extraneous agencies. Mysticism has no need, no use, for such. Nature to the mystic works its own miracles, and while supernaturalism has frequently gone hand in hand with mystic doctrine, it is of another, almost a contrary, nature and essence.

The distinction was recognised and defined in older days. As the supernatural vision of the saints "by bodily sight" was distinguished from the mystic vision "by ghostly sight" (to borrow the phrase of the mystic seeress, Juliana of Norwich), so all kindred gifts of supernaturalism admit of the same discriminative classification: "Visions," said Serenus de Cressy, "which were more pure and withal more certayne were wrought by a divine illapse into the spiritual [as distinct from the sensual] part of the soul." And in that divine "illapse," whether into vision or aught else, of supernatural experiences, lies the intrinsic element which is the hall-mark of the mystic. What to the supernaturalist pure and simple

lay without, to the mystic lay emphatically within.

The identification of the mystic with the symbolist implies an equal confusion of idea. As to have seen a vision, to have achieved some abnormal or occult feat, is not to have become a mystic, so the use of a figurative phraseology, of a vague imagery, in the expression of obscure conceptions concerning matters of sense and matters of soul, does not predicate more than an æsthetic and literary inclination. Between mystic and symbolist there is identity of language, yet that identity in no wise bridges the dividing gulf. Though each may use the same similitude, the attitude of mind of the one bears no kinship to the mental outlook of the other.

To the æsthetic symbolist, the inter-connection of the emblem with that which it conveys or represents to the understanding is accidental, temporal, a matter of images associated artificially with thought. To the mystic a symbol is far more. For him it possesses (again we have the " illapse " into the spirit-vitality of things substantial and material) some radical affinity with the thing symbolised. Some fundamental, permanent, essential correspondence of life with life must exist between the conception which emanates from man's spirit

and the image of it which emanates from nature animate or inanimate. And the link binding the one to the other is not a conception fabricated by the fancy of man, but a relationship immanent in nature.

In truth this pervading assumption of undercurrents in life, of lives within lives, forms an elementary characteristic of the mystic's creed, and while, broadly speaking, the tendency of the supernaturalist has been to materialise spirit, that of the mystic has, however unconsciously, led him to spiritualise matter.

The continual recognition of such undercurrents, the insistent recognition of the dormant energies that act as motive forces upon the outward course of events, places *Le Trésor des Humbles*, with other of Maeterlinck's transcendental essays, amongst the works of mystic literature where the religious and devotional writings of Catholic ascetics—Ruysbroeck, Suso, Juan de la Cruz—stand side by side with the writings of secular mysticism—the writings of a Jacob Böhme and a Novalis—the spiritual philosophers of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

The past annals of mysticism, viewed from its human side, showed two distinct phases; the ascetic, and what, for want of a positive term, must be called the non-ascetic. And

although in the spirit of mysticism there is nor Jew nor Gentile, nor bond nor free, the ascetic, whose sole aim was the divine communion, conformed most frequently to the cloistral ideal of Catholicism. He sought God in God. For the non-ascetic the search not seldom resolved itself into a Christianised Pantheism which reconciled earth with heaven. He sought God in nature. And while Catholicism cradled the one, the upspringing of the romantic school of thought in Germany gave typical expression and stimulus to the other, not only amongst men enfranchised from the usurpations of doctrinal authority, but also amongst those less tentative thinkers who adhered to the ancient faith.

Each school displayed its own leading characteristics.

The mystic ascetic of Catholicism—albeit from age to age the Church regarded the mystic devotee with a suspicion which endorsed the dictum that "if the mystic of the East is always a slave, the mystic of the West is usually a rebel"—regarded life, the human and earth existence, from the point of view inculcated by the dogma of the fall of man. His acceptance of the doctrine of intuitive certitudes of divine truth was closely bound up with the principles of ascetic abnegation resulting from the con-

ception of a creation contaminated by sin. It was in the practice of obedience, humility, and renunciation : " l'abnégation stérile, la pudeur, la chasteté arbitraire, le renoncement aveugle, la soumission obscure, l'esprit de pénitence," and the other " parasite virtues," included in Maeterlinck's catalogue, that he sought illumination. Life bore for him one sole aspect, it was a probation, a pilgrimage, its only object, to be pursued at all hazards by the knight-errants of faith, the greater glory of God. Man was an exile—*exules filii Hevæ*—earth was his place of banishment. The body was a hindrance if not an enemy, unregenerated human nature an inheritance of certain perdition.

Such was the Catholic creed. True, the captive in this vale of tears held in secure hands the key of his mortal prison-house. True, the hostage whom life held might purchase his release. But, born before the days of cheap merchandise, his ransom was literally a dear bargain of hunger and thirst, of tears and blood-shedding. Whatever had been their primeval innocence, the fall, even mystically interpreted, had radically corrupted the natural and physical instincts of humanity; and steeped in the heroic traditions of monastic ideals, the ascetic repudiated not only those criminal indulgences prohibited by Christian morality,

but likewise the most blameless of earthly affections and secular joys. He repressed with fierce and jealous endeavour every craving, every attachment of manhood and womanhood of which God might not be claimed as the source, the centre and the goal.

Religious theosophy in Germany, retaining an equally austere sense of the obligations imposed by the moral code of Christian creeds, made a first descent from the cloistral ideal of the ascetic life. As the free spirit of romanticism, secular and religious, gained supremacy, German mysticism, discarding the purely religious garb, entered upon a more varied and a more widely human stage. The Catholic poet, Johann Scheffler, the Lutheran hymn-writer, Paul Gerhardt, had led the way to a religious appreciation of the mystic aspects of nature. With Jacob Böhme, writing one century later, more especially with Novalis,[1] writing two centuries later, the search after God in nature assumed a singularly winning character. A typical exponent of an attitude of mind at once keenly metaphysical and temperamentally emotional, the love of earth had set its indelible mark upon that wandering son of sombre Moravian parentage. A certain sunny friendliness is the general

[1] *Les Disciples à Saïs* et les Fragments de Novalis, traduits par Maeterlinck, 1895.

characteristic of all Novalis's references to the earth-life he was so soon to quit. The Catholic's place of exile is to him a well-loved home. Nature, a nature no fall could corrupt or defile, was sacred to him in her unfathomable mysteries; it was dear to him as healing and solace for body and soul; it was the vast green-floored, blue-ceilinged nursery, whose doors for ever stand wide open for all who will to enter and find rest. Men, like spoilt children, fearing their father, may turn to her cradle and seek "un réfuge près de leur mère."

The love of earth, already associated with mystical religion in the beautiful sixteenth-century hymns of Scheffler and Gerhardt, was secularised in Novalis's heart. In the half-fantastic language of his romance, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," he made his old gardener-sage the spokesman of that nature-love which is so clear a feature in art when present in unpremeditated sincerity, and shows so poor a countenance when forced and counterfeit. He made himself earth's interpreter. For him, life, in the old sentence, sleeps in the stones, dreams in the plants, and wakens in man. Plants are the direct speech of the earth; each new leaf, each marvellous blossom, is some secret upspringing, which, as it cannot trans-

mute itself to love and desire, becomes a mute tranquil plant :—

> If in some solitary place one finds such a flower, is it not as if it illuminated all around ? And is it not there where the small winged voices most willingly abide ? Well might he that sees weep for joy and, severed from the world, set hands and feet in the earth to strike root there and never more abandon that happy companionship. . . .

This eternal abiding joy is the hidden spell which the earth's surface holds for the feet of men ; " it solves the riddle of life and men henceforth divine whence the road comes and whither it goes. . . ." And if to Novalis himself the riddle of the whence and the whither, the question of the before and after, comes as an uncertainty, it is an uncertainty undarkened by fears and tinted with all the rainbow colours of his inveterately hopeful moods.

It is difficult not to believe that in spite of all its reverses, life, in his own phrase, was for him " le commencement d'un roman sans fin," and death, to revert to the Christian definition, but a passage of life to life. " Life is death, life is life, death is life "—as another mystic of the same period defined the three phases of thought under which existence may be regarded in the ascending scale of truth.

Is it not possible, Novalis asks, that some nativities are but the dyings of the pre-existent spirit? "N'y aurait-il pas aussi une mort de l'autre côté, dont le résultat serait la naissance terrestre?" Birth he conceived of as "un choix primitif," and, once terrestrialised, life, with its winged desires, is "not a dream but may become one." Here and there truly passages recur bearing the impress of lapses into cloudier thoughts, but the simple childlike openheartedness with which, in depths of personal grief and personal loss, he accepts, eagerly, consolation, gives its distinguishing note of true optimism to his philosophy. If more than once he allows that "life is a malady," he is in the same breath eager to demonstrate that disease is itself a very important factor in existence of which we know but imperfectly the utility—"were I to become its prophet!" adds the would-be apostle on whom, in very truth, sickness had laid its heaviest hand.

After some such fragmentary, disjointed, and discursive fashion, Novalis, profound thinker as he was, thinks those thoughts which left so clear a mark upon his literary successors. And he thinks them, not as a teacher severed from the herd, but as the member of a well-loved fraternity of trees and four-footed beasts and

men, whose affections cling to the very soil beneath his feet :—

> Over the white dry land the green coverlet of love is outspread . . . and its strange inscription is read only by the beloved . . . ever he reads and is not satiated with reading, and daily beholds therein new revelations.

Almost in his human passion for earth we catch a faint echo of that sublime passion of the recluse for God : " I saw Him and I sought Him, I had Him and I wanted Him."

Moreover, the pervading sentiment of that kindly brotherhood embraces humanity itself. Affections, purified of their dross, are to him levers of the spiritual life. " The true measure of a thing is its utmost compass," and the span of earthly love is the measure of infinity. Love is the knowledge of immortality, it is more : " Was ist die Religion als ein unendliches Einverständniss, eine ewige Vereinigung liebender Herzen." And as Novalis wrote, he, notwithstanding the weakened copy man achieves of his ideals, according to his capacity, lived; joys, great and small, of earth reinstated purified of dross; affections of earth reconsecrated as the deepest educational experiences of the soul which aspires, and his own love, however exaggerated in its emotional

sentiment for the child-betrothed who was to the young poet-romantic as Beatrice to Dante, confessed as the ennobling influence of a youth dedicated soul and spirit—" les deux lignes partent de l'homme et finissent en Dieu "—to some attainment of the highest.

Maeterlinck's mysticism differs necessarily from the ascetic mysticism of cloistral Catholicism. He has translated it to another clime from the world where Ruysbroeck, Suso, Juliana, and their fellows prayed and fasted, saw hard-won visions with eyes shut to all earth's pleasures, and learnt the secrets of God in lives of abstinence, mortification and seclusion. The search for God in God is not his. From the non-ascetic mysticism of the romantic secularist, in its phase of religious pantheism, he diverges equally. He is at no pains, with Novalis, to lose himself in nature that he may become one with God. He has no faith in the saving beatitudes of a creation animated and instinct with the spirit of its divine indwelling. The search for God in nature is not his. For him the hidden God, the divine principle, is to be sought in man—" il y a sur cette terre autant de dieux cachés que de cœurs qui palpitent."

Thus the circle revolves, the circle of the possibilities open to the seeker, and thus it

closes—God in God—God in Nature—God in Man. So far no other seeking-places have presented themselves to the soul of mankind in its spiritual quest for the divine. Maeterlinck embodies the results of his search in the first three volumes of his prose works.

VIII

THE ESSAYS

In *Le Trésor des Humbles*, in *Le Temple Enseveli* [1896], in *La Sagesse et la Destinée* [1898], Maeterlinck to a considerable extent popularised a theory—to undergo both future modification and extension—of metaphysical idealism coloured by an imaginative intellectuality and an æsthetic emotionalism, a theory too vague to be named a system, too restrictedly personal, perhaps, to impose itself as a doctrine. In his plays it expressed itself as the sentiment of an emotional morality in action; in his prose it takes upon itself the semblance of an intuitive morality in repose. It is a theory dealt with mainly in its application to the "day-by-day" life of the world, and that day-by-day life is presented as a spiritual earth-existence exteriorly cast in the mould of an outward destiny, dominated by its great crises of love and death; interiorly cast in a mould of a far different fashioning, wrought after a far different pattern by the working of that inner principle, "la destinée

intime," whose agent is the ultimate and essential soul within the soul of man. And within that soul resides the " Invisible Goodness," the equity, the aspiration, the ideal, of the individual and of the race. It is there that we may find Le Temple Enseveli of " la justice " ; it is there that we, who are at once the criminals and the judges in its final court of appeal, " sommes demeurés justes dans l'injustice même."

From the solitary watch-tower of mystic philosophy Maeterlinck surveys the panorama of events, emotional events, material events, that encompass and invade this territory of the soul. He views them, in essays which prelude wider outlooks, mainly from the standpoint of their mortal limitations, of their mortal span. For the hour, at least, he defers the consideration of the three great darknesses of the questioning spirit—the whence, the wherefore, and the whither—which occupy his later works. And speaking from that same watch-tower of the initiate, he sets forth how man, having attained by intuition (the voice of the inmost shrine of silence), by introspection (the vision of the shut eyes, the " dark night " of the soul to whose depth the seer must trust himself), to some true perception of the intrinsic and divine nature of life (" ce qui

s'appelait 'les dieux,' aujourd'hui on l'appelle 'la vie'" . . .), may recast, remould, recreate life's attendant outward circumstances after the spiritual design revealed to the illuminated idealist.

And whether the hypotheses, the ideas and ideals, with their application to the conduct and practice of daily human existence, be acceptable or not to his readers, one and all of those who are conversant with his works will pay homage to the spirit of reverence and sympathy permeating an ethical philosophy founded, if not upon an authoritative revelation, upon a spiritual and always elevated interpretation of the daily mystery and miracle of human life.

It is impossible to formulate rigidly intentions, points of view, principles of interpretation, and abstract propositions left, maybe purposely, maybe of necessity, undefined. Many of the ideas dealt with or propounded belong to a region of remote thought and feeling for which language, with all its resources and metaphysical idioms, affords, by the confession of those who best employ it, but an imperfect and often purely symbolic equivalent: "Many thoughts are too delicate to be thought, many more are too delicate to be spoken," Novalis, who of all men, perhaps,

came nearest to the expression of the impossible, avowed candidly. Maeterlinck re-echoes the assertion :—

Il n'est pas possible de parler clairement de ces choses. Qu'est-ce enfin que cette sagesse dont nous parlons ainsi ? N'essayons pas de le définir trop strictement, car ce sera l'emprisonner ; "le mot sage," observes Joubert, "le mot sage dit à un enfant est un mot qu'il comprend toujours et qu'on ne lui explique jamais."

Yet, leaving on one side those hypothetical theories appertaining to attitudes of mind or conditions of consciousness foreign to the general experience of mankind—hypotheses which, as Novalis claims, may serve as nets to catch truth, but which more often, it may be conjectured, are too wide-meshed to bring their catch to land; leaving also on one side theories so vague that they neither challenge nor admit of analysis, Maeterlinck's application of the doctrines of elder mysticism to conditions of modern life, modern thought, and human conduct has an aspect neither vague nor indefinable.

Words may be inadequate to portray the operations, inspirations, and spiritual processes ascribed to *l'âme intime* of the chosen few, but it is open to all to trace the concrete influence—or the defect of influence—of elder

doctrines transposed into new keys. Incorporated in Maeterlinck's judgments, his valuations and appraisements of the emotions suffered by the many, and of the incidents which befall the elect and the unelect alike of the human race and the undistinguished multitude, mystical theory translates itself into the vulgar tongue of character and conduct. It becomes "la morale mystique" of his ethical writings. If, to put it otherwise, the inaccessible and secret wisdom, transcending reason and understanding and coming only as a special revelation to the inner group of the illuminate, eludes verbal formulas, we may still investigate what growths there be, healthful or poisonous, good or evil, which germinate in the atmosphere of light surrounding the disciples of mysticism. If we cannot aspire to see the feet of the forerunners of transcendental thought—the feet of messengers that pass in the night—we may still track the footprints left upon earth and snow and sand, and divine in their direction a goal.

And whether or not such an investigation incline the student to descry in Maeterlinck the apostle of a future creed of emotional morality, it will be readily conceded that as an apostle of a new, or a revivalist of an old, gospel of philosophic mysticism he is, amongst contemporary writers, its foremost literary exponent.

His earlier essays present Maeterlinck, both as artist and thinker, in a restricted phase. In them his window opens with a narrow aperture upon the outside world, and although the vistas that lie open to his gaze stretch into the infinite they are straitly bound to right and to left. With Novalis, history, science, art, all served their turn as bases and stimulants to thought, each had the power of awaking or arresting his sympathetic attention, and of kindling the fantastic fires of his imaginative faculties. Maeterlinck concentrated his interest upon the moods of humanity alone, his sympathies are totally absorbed in the contemplation of men's emotions, griefs and desires. Moreover, these are surveyed, almost exclusively, in relation, on the one hand, to that remote dweller within the threshold of the soul, to whom he awards the distinction of *l'âme intime*, in relation, on the other hand, to those external events, the results of chance or law, which, allied with the instincts of the sense-soul, *l'âme extérieure*, fashion, if unthwarted, the mortal destiny of each individual personality, and both are regarded in relation to that search after the hidden God in which the soul of man, consciously or unaware of its higher instinct, is perpetually engaged.

The veiled soul of the soul, equally (and

immeasurably) distant from the outer, the sense-soul, of the body, and from the body itself, constitutes the background of every thought and idea expressed. It is this soul of the soul, royally seated within a fortress impregnable to the assault of evil, a fortress of which the co-tenant is that "goodly will that never assenteth unto sin, ne never shall," known to the mystic optimist, Juliana of Norwich, which may say to the sins, the crimes, red-handed, of the rebel senses, "I know you not"—"ils ont été commis à mille lieues de son trône."

Whatever may be the exact nature of the abstract fundamental doctrines lying at the root of Maeterlinck's philosophy of life spiritual and of life material, the position he persistently occupies is far more characteristic of an evangelist of ideals than of a doctor of a theoretic and dogmatic transcendentalism. His essays give as clear and definite an exposition as is possible of these ideals and of the modes of feeling they induce. From his essays we may gather a lucid appreciation of the standpoint from which he views the life of earth, existence as a whole, as a universal condition of being governed by remote general forces, subject to inevitable and eternally conflicting influences, predestined to live the dual life of a spiritual

ideal perpetually outraged by actualities of living, and outstretched between two impenetrably obscure infinities.

Sometimes it is difficult to dissociate the uniformly mournful impression produced by the perusal of Maeterlinck's meditations from the actual drift of his evangel of peace and tranquillity. Even when his mental attitude admits of no strict analysis, it conveys the sentiment of a profound, passive, unresentful melancholy. He deals at length and in detail with many of the tangled problems, the besetting questions of existence abstract and actual. And though the reply rendered by individual beliefs to the enigmas of the twin eternities of past and future, although the answer to that yet more inscrutable "why," might seem to be factors of paramount importance in the formation of "la vie intérieure" which absorbs his attention, he still, postponing their consideration, elected to pass them by in premeditated and almost unbroken silence.

Life, as he would seem here to interpret it, lies between two abysses, *la destinée intérieure* and *la destinée extérieure*, which, "lorsqu'il est libre ne veut guère que le mal." Allied with our instincts, it becomes "la fatalité noire," the adversary, the devastator of happi-

ness. Wisdom alone, the wisdom of the secret recesses of the soul, may direct the currents, if it cannot change the inflowing, of outward happenings. "En élargissant, en développant notre activité nous nous transformerons en fatalité," is Novalis's succinct statement of the doctrine to which Maeterlinck gives reiterated and reinforced expression:

Si Judas sort ce soir il ira vers Judas et aura l'occasion de trahir, mais si Socrate ouvre sa porte, il trouvera Socrate endormi sur le seuil et aura l'occasion d'être sage. Nos aventures errent autour de nous comme les abeilles sur le point d'essaimer errent autour de la ruche. Elles attendent que l'idée-mère sorte enfin de notre âme. . . . Mentez, et les mensonges accourront; aimez, et la grappe d'aventures frisonnera d'amour. Il semble que tout n'attende qu'un signal intérieur. . . . Il n'arrive jamais de grands événements intérieurs à ceux qui n'ont rien fait pour les appeler à eux. . . .

The life of man is a beleaguered city; every rampart, every antechamber, unoccupied by the force of the soul, is mastered by antagonistic and overwhelming powers: "Tout vide dans le cœur ou dans l'intelligence devient le réservoir d'influences fatales"; is assailed by powers that turn the guns they have captured against the walls in the "provisional darkness" of this sphere. Misery and happiness hang sus-

pended upon the issues of the siege, while "nos aventures errent autour de nous," that which is within drawing to itself its outward counterpart and similitude.

As concerns the balance of joy and grief, there can be little question as to which way it tends. The scale is weighted. True, Maeterlinck starts with an initial assumption that man is made for happiness as the body is made for health: "l'humanité est faite pour être heureuse. . . ." Nevertheless the intention has hitherto proved abortive. For the moment:

> La misère est une maladie de l'humanité comme la maladie est une misère de l'homme. . . . Le malheur est sorti de l'enfance depuis des centaines de siècles . . . le bonheur dort encore dans les langes.

And when, passing from his considerations of "sagesse," destiny, calamity, and misfortune, he treats of the nature of happiness, in spite of his unfailing felicity of expression he cannot convince us that he is at home with his subject. Happiness, although its fountainhead may indeed lie in the deepest recesses of wisdom, must, by the test of universal experience, find its daily aliment in little things, in the innumerable trivialities, transitory and

evanescent, that, like floating atoms, catch the sunlight of flitting moments. Maeterlinck's conception of happiness takes but small cognisance of these irrational joys. It lacks their buoyancy, their freshness, their youth. "Être heureux, c'est d'avoir dépassé l'inquiétude du bonheur." For him it is resignation, it is quietude, it is consolation, it is the negation of sadness and unrest, it is the anodyne that annuls the pain of disillusion, it is the tranquillity of the storm-beaten wreck cast up upon the sand, of "the quiet sleep that fears no foul weather":—

> Le plus heureux des hommes est celui qui connait le mieux son bonheur; et celui qui le connait le mieux est celui qui sait le plus profondement que le bonheur n'est separé de la détresse que par une idée haute, infatigable, humaine et courageuse.

But who amongst us of the unmystic laity would call this heroic transfiguration of the actual by the ideal, happiness, or, if happiness, well may it be said "la joie fait peur." "Be gay, my daughter, be gay," was Ruysbroeck's counsel to his spiritual daughter in her life of devotion to the sick and dying. The mysticism of to-day would seem to have no use for such gaiety. It has no playtime, no light-heartedness, no vitality, no youth, and no promise.

It is the very twilight of gladness; it may indeed be the fruit of eternity, but it is in no sort the flower of time. It is a happiness almost incompatible with gaiety. As in Hazlitt's phrase man must choose between it and joy. "Too gay to be happy or too happy to be gay" sums up the conditions of his alternatives.

And all the while, neither glad nor sorry—for nothing can cast a shadow where the light burns from within—the all-wise soul, immaculate as snow, sits in the silence which is her voice, while the tortured tides of life, loves, hates, sins, hopes, desires, and despairs surge round her throne. And soul with soul holds communion in those hours "où les âmes se touchent et savent tout sans qu'on ait besoin de remuer les lèvres." And each soul, from amongst all souls, chooses with close-shut lips its elect fellow. The hands of man and woman touch, their voices speak one with another, their hearts beat in accord, the contract of earth is sealed and signed, but beneath and beyond, the hands of the soul are outstretched to accept, to ratify, or to reject, according to far other rules and in fulfilment of far other decrees. It holds no council, it seeks no confidant in the bodily senses and affections, the pleasures and pains of the body are, again to cite Novalis, merely the sensations of

the soul's dreams. Men live with but a dim apprehension of its loves, its gifts, its ideals, its moralities, its "justice." Arbitrary and absolute, it cherishes what man refuses and knits its own bonds in regions where the heart, the reason, and the senses alike tread only as alien guests, where the stained mantle of guilt drops from the sinner's shoulders in the commonwealth of the spirit, and the soul of the outcast communes in silence with the soul of the virgin: "l'âme d'un forçat viendra se taire divinement avec l'âme d'une vierge."

So the two destinies, of which life embodies the action and counter-action, are brought into juxtaposition—the one whose abode is silence, the other which dwells in the realm of sound. And life sways for ever between that silence and that sound—a silence where all things infinite are made known, a sound where all things infinite are forgotten.

It is perhaps inevitable that sadness should pervade a philosophy resting upon so unequivocal a recognition of ideals unrealised and aspirations unattained. Nevertheless, Maeterlinck himself has formulated the lesson—sadness, even the greatest sadnesses do not mould the strong man, but are moulded by him. Sadness is as clay to the potter, out of it he fashions the wings or the weights of life.

And if at times Maeterlinck's shield of life is a field sable, if its flag floats for ever at half-mast high, if the escutcheon of love is a twilight emblazoned with dying flames, if death is imaged as a gateway into a mist and the record of time marked, as the hours of the dial, only by the shadow that passes until the shadow itself is lost in the night, there is still a current of thought underlying the sadness, tending towards a more hopeful appreciation of the uncertainties of unsolved enigmas, a happier confidence in the power of the hands behind the screen that determine life's issues.

The doctrine propounded by the sage in *Le Trésor des Humbles*, who, walking by the seashore, discoursed of the secret recesses of the heart where abides the principle of beauty, truth, and righteousness, opens to view vistas where the sorrow of living is illuminated by the radiance of a star. The doctrine of the hidden conscience of humanity which rejudges the verdict of the world opens the way to a more optimistic appreciation of human equity, and predicates a more Utopian future for the race. " Il y a en nous un esprit qui ne pèse que les intentions," face to face with that brutal material force " qui ne pèse que les faits." This spirit, discerning truth, redistributes praise and dispraise, measures with

true measures, acquits and condemns, clothed in the white ermine of incorruptible, inviolate majesty. It is a spirit of justice which at the very moment "où nous croyons qu'il n'est plus, voici qu'il reparaît et se redresse au fond de notre cœur." "Il est certain qu'au fond de la vie morale de chacun de nous se trouve une image de cette justice invisible et incorruptible."

This justice of the soul comprehends in itself all human and mortal virtues, it ennobles and gives to them the right to penetrate within the threshold of our moral life.

On la retrouve ainsi au centre de tout idéal. Elle est au milieu de l'amour de la beauté. Elle est également la bonté, la pitié, la générosité et l'héroisme, car ils sont les actes de justice de celui qui s'est élevé assez haut pour ne plus voir uniquement le juste et l'injuste à ses pieds et dans le cercle étroit des obligations que le hasard lui impose, mais par delà les années et les destinées voisines, par delà ce qu'il doit, par delà ce qu'il aime, par delà ce qu'il rencontre, par delà ce qu'il cherche . . . par delà ce qu'il espère et ce qu'il redoute, par delà les torts et les crimes mêmes de ses frères, les hommes.

And in the supremacy of the ruling of this inner principle, should it ever attain to that supremacy, lies the promise of the world's salvation.

Following the course of Maeterlinck's essays from the earlier to the more recent, following the path of " la morale mystique " in its wide application and discursive studies, we have travelled far from the starting-point both of the ascetic's self-annihilation in the divine communion, and of the non-ascetic's absorption of self in the communion of nature.

For Maeterlinck to add to the consciousness of our inner life, to the realisation of self in self, to aspire " to be what we are," to enter into the hidden kingdom—the Buried Temple—which is within us, which is the kingdom of the soul, is the primary purpose—it is also the final destination of the pilgrim march of humanity.

That march continues from time out of mind in the strange, troubled, confused annals of action and thought constituting the history of humanity, and nothing is stranger than the spectacle it presents of the duality of human aim. On the one side is the fierce competitive search after the conquest of material and physical good, the possession of the kingdoms of the earth and the glory and sensual pleasure thereof; on the other the assurance that underneath all the violence, injustice, wrong-doing of the dusty arenas of time, where each combatant strives for self, humanity is ever pursuing by devious roads another goal; is pursuing what

we call in its broadest sense, the search after God.

Speculations of philosophers, hypotheses of metaphysicians, dogmas of theologians, have immemorially met without answering that universal impulse and instinct of a faith which seeks, however crudely, to define its vague aspiration and reduce it to the definition of a symbol. And from time immemorial those seekers for the Divine Presence have trodden roads which might appear rather to circle round the labyrinth of a maze than to advance upon any given track. The Unknown is still hidden in the known, the Unseen still veiled in the seen, the Uncreated is still shrouded under the envelopment of the created. Moreover during that march of man through the ages, in Maeterlinck's words, "les dieux qui l'accompagnent grandissent mais s'éloignent."

Nevertheless man has not abandoned the adventure. And the quest is so persistent, and the finding in any real sense for the great majority of searchers is so far removed from success that we are almost converted to the belief that man in the searching, not in the finding, fulfils what up to this present is the purpose of his spiritual existence—that the quest, and not the attainment of the quest, is

the condition of development for that inner principle of self we name the soul.

Thus Maeterlinck's philosophy closes the ring of the mystic search—the search for God in God, by a path arduous and sublime of worship and adoration; the search for God in Nature, by a path of humility and love; the search for God in Man, under whose beggar rags Maeterlinck descries the gleaming of the divine raiment.

IX

NATURE

Of that other section of creation, of the earth-life of tree and plant, of beast and bird, by which human existence is environed, the philosophic essays of Maeterlinck's first three volumes take curiously little account. The slide of nature had here, as it were, slipped from his thought.

The verses of *Serres Chaudes* contain their imagery of rank hothouse growths—"la végétation de symboles." Amid desert forests, through the moist verdure, upspring, beneath those blurred, nebulous cupolas, a whole flora of blossoms, yellow, red, and white, an exotic, healthless flora, the mirage blossomings of a wizard's incantation.

His early dramas, after a similar guise, utilise nature as the mirror upon whose surface humanity casts the reflections of its own emotions, moods, and instincts; while in the mirror humanity holds to nature he portrays only man's moods, emotions, and instincts in

refracted images. The malady of humanity infects the very atmosphere of all that surrounds and encompasses man, and the passing of the human soul leaves a shadowy film upon the clear air.

The elaborate stage directions, the references of the dramatic dialogue to the scenes and environments where persons and events meet, denote a background which is merely a symbolic *décor de théâtre*, an assortment of images used to lay an extra weight of emphasis upon the thought and action of the piece. The lives of heroes and heroines are spent in solitary castles with interminable corridors, sepulchral vaults, and many-windowed chambers. Sunken crypts, passages leading none know whither, perforate the ground beneath, stagnant moats encompass the walls, or slow-watered canals bound the palace precincts. Fountains of fathomless depth play in thin jets of spray above their stone basins in dank willow-shaded gardens. Beyond are enclosing forests, or it may be endless swamps, malarial marshes exuding pestilences. Near at hand stretch sullen, low-voiced seas. Somewhere are mountains, and always there are mists, mists that brood and hover over sea and land, mists that drift and float, mists that are stationary, motionless; vapours that come and go with

poison of fever and poison of chill in their breath, mists that are like persons of the play with their exits and entrances. There are sudden winds that fall into sudden silences, shadows that outline the narrow spaces of hazy moonlights, dull heats that trail evil after them, and water whose profound slumber may be heard by the bending ear.

All these things belong to the transformation scenes of symbolic semblances. Change the foreground of human emotion and nature is transfigured. To Merlin's desolate garden, weed-stifled and desert, where leaves are sere and blossoms dwarfed and withering, the spring comes, drunken with joy, and invades the close, where death had reigned, as the two lovers kiss. Like the legendary tree Eve, exiled from Eden, planted, white-leaved in her virginity, green-leaved in her bridal sleep, red-fruited when the first blood flowed upon earth, so here nature makes her instantaneous response to passion, and the shrivelled foliage, the faded petals, revive, transformed to splendour and profusion of palpitating colour; wide-cupped convolvulus, purple scabious, and rose-pink oleanders make a new wilderness; birds sing, bees swarm, butterflies flutter, fruits ripen, and the gold rays of sunlight scintillate in floods of radiance:—

JOYZELLE. Il n'y a plus ici que les fleurs et la vie.

Here and everywhere in Maeterlinck's poetic and dramatic work there is no evasion, no escape for nature from the all-pervading atmosphere of human sentiment. Flowers, trees, grass, herbs, storm and calm, sea and forest, are saturated, are steeped in it. The order of creation is reversed, man is the initial letter as he is the last syllable of nature's alphabet. Every phenomenon, every denizen, animal or vegetable, of earth exists only for its human *double entende*, its emotional counterpart, its use in interpreting or accenting a sensation, a catastrophe, befalling man or woman. Over Maleine's espousal feast meteors, like the tears of stars, seem to asperge the skies with blood. The heavens are palled in black and the moon is masked in redness; willows strew brown leaves upon the hands and heads of lovers predestined to die; the wind-shaken drops of the fountain's jet baptise their brows for the grave.

Though in other dramas the melodrama of the scenery is indicated with more reticence, nature and her children are still strictly within the range of theatrical symbolism. The blood-streaked swan floating on the surface of the moat beneath the window of the chamber where the little princess lies murdered;

"l'agneau familier" of Alladine, who at the approach of temptation, at the coming of the lover whose love will stain, escapes from her hold to drown in the swirl of the turbulent stream; the doves of Mélisande, flying white fugitives from the tower when Pelléas, repeating the wooing scene in the fairy tale of Rapunzel, sends his kisses to her lips by the luminous ladder of her hair, all these belong to the ark of allegory. They are earth-children who have caught the contagion of man's fevered life; it is nature blemished with the leprosy of his sickness, contaminated by his sins, loves, deaths. The flowers are artificial growths, the beasts are only beast-masks and belong to the region of tragic pantomime. They exist only in and for man, they exist only to give a last tint of colour to the atmospheric effects at which Maeterlinck's art aimed.

The transition is radical from the emblematic suggestion of nature in Maeterlinck's dramatic pictorialism to his descriptive presentment of it in his prose works.

"Man stands in as many and in as immeasurably different relationships to nature as to mankind," Novalis wrote, speaking of past races. "To some nature wore the countenance of a deity. Others thought of her only in the light of a host—earth their inn—at

whose table they might freely seat themselves." Others, discerning in her neither a temple nor yet a mere banquet-hall, have been content to accept her for herself and " out of a wide earth to recreate a gentle Eden." Of these last Maeterlinck is a kinsman in spirit. His apotheosis of his garden commonwealth, his patient, closely studied annals of the queendoms of his hives, his loving observation of the flowers that pasture the bees no less than of the bees who, in exchange for the rifled treasure of honey, carry, with shining wings outspread, the fertilising pollen to the tiny flower-chambers of birth, betoken that in more recent years, if not in earlier days, he has entered into friendly, fraternal relationship with earth and found in her what Novalis named the quality of social domesticity.

He has not, it is true, trodden in the footprints of medieval ascetics, saints who in no spirit of childish fantasy, but in sober, if gay, earnest, called on all the works of the Lord to praise His name and gave practical and individual meaning to their faith in the worship by the life-created of the life-creator; who acknowledging a community of obedience, love, and adoration, demanded no equivocal testimony from their spiritual kinsmen of their devotion; who preached with Francis to

" miei sirocchie," the birds, or undertook with zest the conversion of such four-footed felons as the " ferocissimo lupo d' Agobio."

Nor, turning from ascetic tradition, does he award any specific attention to the beliefs of secular mysticism in the multitudinous souls that are immanent in creation, that possess the elements—the earth, the air, the water, the flame.

The fantastic problems that prompted many a picturesque phrase in Novalis's fragmentary speculations, spontaneous offshoots of his transcendental musings, have little or no place in Maeterlinck's interpretations of nature's operations. To Novalis nature, with all its varying forms and shapes of living things, formed a constant text-book for hazardously imaginative divinations. If at times his intellect wandered into more barren heights of purely metaphysical enquiry, to his heart nature was ever present. He was of her household, of her fellowship. Inanimate to his eyes nature could not be. Life is migratory, ever shifting its energies. Stones to his fancy die into plants, plants in their turn die into animals. " Plants are language to the earth's thoughts." Humankind is but the elder brother, spirit endowed, of one vast earth-born family. Are not, he asks, the herbs the daughters, the beasts sons, of earth, our mother ? Do they not also touch

unseen horizons ? As Maeterlinck has rendered the beauty of his sentence : " Le monde des fleurs est un infini lointain. . . . Il y a maintes fleurs en ce monde qui ne sont d'origine supraterrestre." And is not the flower-world the sleeping-place of the sleepless, the rest of unrest ? " La sieste du royaume spirituel est le monde floral."

With no less beauty and grace has Maeterlinck clothed the thoughts nature has suggested and inspired, and he stands indeed upon a vantage-ground of closer study, of clearer appreciation, of a more accurate understanding of the laws elucidated by modern science. Nevertheless to most of us the appeal lies almost more in the human charm of these pages, in the sympathy which lends to his descriptions of blossom and leaf and stem the vividness of a personal touch, than in the grave endeavour to detect evidences in the workings, the movements, the contrivances and the organism of his garden companions of " l'intelligence universelle "—described as " une sorte de fluide universel qui pénétre diversement, selon qu'ils sont bons ou mauvais conducteurs de l'esprit, les organismes qu'il rencontre."

Many years ago the learned Erasmus Darwin, in ponderous folios, " enlisted Imagination under the Banner of Science," and published

his twin Botanic Poems, taking for theme "The Economy of the Plants":—

Lo, here a Camera Obscura is presented to thy view [so runs the preface in its old-world rhetoric], in which are lights and shades dancing on a whited canvas and magnified into apparent life . . . if thou art at leisure, walk in and view the wonders of my Enchanted Garden. . . . As Ovid, the necromancer, did of poetic art transmute Men, Women, yea, Gods also, into Trees and Flowers, so will he, the chronicler of the Loves of the Plants, restore Trees and Flowers to their Original, disclosing them as gods, as lovers, as brides.

Brides such as she who in her hymeneal union greets her bridegroom "with silken curtains withdrawn," lovers like to him who

> Gives to her hand the honeyed cup,
> Loves out his hour and leaves his life in air.

Past is the day of the elder Darwin's prolix embroideries of fanciful allegory, encrusted with allusions to classic deities, to Rosicrucian Sylphids and Salamanders. The new age asks to see what is presented to it of nature unornamented in her own forms and semblances. Maeterlinck has chosen his part with the generation of to-day. In *La Vie des Abeilles*, in *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, and in all other scattered essays that deal with the lives and loves of those two miniatures of creation,

the Bee and the Flower, he has scarcely inscribed a sentence that the most unlearned of his readers cannot follow with ease : " I wish," so he defines his aims, " to speak of the Bees very simply as one speaks of a subject one knows and loves to those who know it not. . . . I myself have now for a long time ceased to look for anything more beautiful in this world or more interesting than truth. . . ."

And if truth forces his hand, if nature demands the eye of the artist for its colours, the word of the poet for its sounds, the sense of the dramatist for its manifestations, and the soul of the mystic to divine its impulses, these and all his gifts Maeterlinck uses only so far as they fulfil the requisitions of truth.

With descriptive veracity, however, he is not content. It is in the last resort, unobtrusively no doubt, but with full intention and conscious purpose, as a philosopher that Maeterlinck walks in his garden, full of those blossoms without whose loveliness his earth would rest forlorn :—

> Savons-nous ce que serait une humanité qui ne connaîtrait pas la fleur ? Si celle-ci n'existait pas, si elle avait toujours été cachée à nos regards . . . notre caractère, notre morale, notre aptitude à la beauté, au bonheur, seraient-ils bien les mêmes ?

Suns, stars, moonlight, skies, clouds, seas,

dawns and twilights, the mountains, the plain, the forests, rivers, trees, would any of these things fill the place of those myriad, many-hued blossoms which have given to imagination its fairest images, to memories their lingering savour of perfume, to language its beauty, to the eye its loveliest vision, to emotion, to our joys as to our sorrows, a treasure of garnered associations ?

And it is as a philosopher, as a human intelligence in relation with the "intelligence" of Water-lily and Mimosa, of Balsam and Geranium and Rue, and Love-in-a-Mist and "la bonne Sauge" and the golden Broom and the great Orchid race, that he approaches, in garden beds or sunny road-banks or shaded woodland, the objects of his study.

As a human intelligence, as a philosopher, no less he approaches the wonderland of Bees. There is a certain likeness to the frame of mind characteristic of all Thoreau's nature studies in the mental attitude Maeterlinck betrays in the passage where he tells of his earliest acquaintanceship with "twelve domes of straw, some painted a bright pink, some a clear yellow, but most of all a soft blue," set in an angle of the wall, where, in an old sage's green-shuttered Dutch home, he first visited the cities of the Hive. To that garden fair,

peopled with stocks and larkspur, snapdragon, columbine, carnation, and many another old-world blossom, sweet with the scents of springtime and summer,

one came to the school of the Bees to be taught the preoccupations of all-powerful nature . . . the indefatigable organisation of life, the lesson of ardent and disinterested work; and another lesson too, with a moral as good, that these heroic workers taught there and emphasised, as it were, with the fiery darts of their myriad wings, was to appreciate the somewhat vague savour of leisure, to enjoy the almost unspeakable delights of those immaculate days that revolved on themselves in the fields of space, forming merely a transparent globe, as void of memory as the happiness without alloy.

And so throughout his essays. Whether the bees fly hither and thither, with the gleam and incandescence of swift wings, whether it be the secret of the flower-lives, of the perfume which is the soul of the flower, of the colours which are as its voice:—" l'appel des couleurs harmonieuses et éclatantes," which he would fain surprise, never for very long does he let nature draw him, with the net of the senses, wholly to herself, never for very long can he suspend thought, and rest with unlabouring brain in the slumberous languor of passive

enjoyment. He answers her caresses with questionings, for the doom of the questioning spirit has fallen upon him. What can she tell him? What can he read upon the margin of her picture-book? Flowers erect their stems to open their petals to the sun—for him they "concentrate the effort of vegetable life towards life and spirit": "fleurs où se concentre l'effort de la vie végétable vers la lumière et vers l'esprit."

The "sieste florale" of Novalis becomes a world, not of sleep, not of resignation and obedience, but of revolt against a destiny that shackles its desires:—

L'organe essentiel, l'organe nourricier de la plante, sa racine, l'attache indissolublement au sol. S'il est difficile de découvrir parmi les grands lois qui nous accablent, celle qui pèse le plus lourdement à nos épaules, pour la plante, il n'y a pas de doute; c'est la loi qui la condamne à l'immobilité depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort.

Against this law

l'énergie de son idée fixe . . . se tend tout entière dans un même dessein: échapper par le haut à la fatalité du bas. . . .

The flower must summon to its aid all the resources nature provides, and still to live, to perpetuate its race, it must seek allies from

alien spheres: interlopers, birds and winds, must carry her seed, her offspring, beyond the threshold of her home-prison; bees and butterflies, the winged thieves of the free air, must bring to her heart the kiss of the far-off, invisible lover, motionless himself, a captive in his isolation.

And as Maeterlinck reads the story of the flowers, so he made himself the amanuensis of earth in his records, the day-by-day annals, of those domesticated communities, whose small, assiduously industrious, inveterately self-sacrificing members "possess of all the inhabitants of the globe the highest degree of intellect after that of man."

It may come to some amongst us as a surprise that it has been chiefly of these miniatures of nature-life that he has elected to treat, that he has pictured, almost exclusively, the forms of nature that lie more or less, as it were, in the very hand and grasp of man, a life of nature that derives its destinies—with the limitations that the inviolably inherent freedom of nature imposes—in great measure from the care, the forethought, the tending of man. For flowers and bees, if they are earth's offspring, are man's foster-children. The poet has broken the opaque roof of his hothouse glass, but his is not the reactionary craving of the over-civilised man for the

primitive home-places of his race, for the giant forests, the wide plain, and the wild mountain. Nor has the love of the untamed, untamable beast world with furtive padded footfall and swift ivory-hoofed feet, the world of free rushing winds and fierce liberties, set its seal upon his nature lore. And possibly in his choice of theme there may be detected some remnant of his elder vision, which, as once it dwelt mainly upon nature in its symbolised connection with the humanity pictured in his art, so now, in a new phase, dwells upon nature's sons and daughters chiefly in their intimate connection with the humanities of daily life. Nor is it pure fancy if we read in his tenderness of gardener and bee-keeper the source of the partisan antagonism betrayed in the forest scene of *The Blue Bird*, when beasts and trees —Lanier, the mystic rapturist's, "brotherly, sisterly, sweetheart trees"—conspire in sombre hostility to slay the human child wandering alone amongst his earth-enemies.

Howsoever this may be, he has written the summer day-book of the Bees, told the story of the swarm, of the thousand nativities that take place, daily, within the waxen birth-chambers, as spring hours pass by, of the mighty motherhood of that strangest of nature's inventions, the Queen—herself the slave no less than is

the meanest of her subjects—of "the masked power that for the moment we will term the spirit of the hive." To the telling he has brought the poet's mind and the artist's impulse to reproduce and translate into art the knowledge acquired by scientific observation. Most memorably of all, he has related with unrivalled eloquence the brilliant tragedy of the nuptial flight, has related as never again will it be told by any dramatist the doom of those luminous, golden sons of the hive on whom falls the yearly madness, which, preluding their wholesale massacre, possesses the horde of idle males at the sight of that soaring royalty.

With the whole wide heaven of morning for stage the imperial bride, who consummating her espousal in the depths of heaven's blue, must return to the dark shelter of her Queendom and the close chamber of motherhood, makes her hymeneal exit:—

Immediately crowds collect and follow her into the sea of gladness, whose limpid boundaries ever recede. She, drunk with her wings, obeying the magnificent law of the race that chooses her lover and enacts that the strongest alone shall attain her in the solitude of the ether, rises still; and, for the first time in her life, the blue morning air rushes into her stigmata, singing its song, like the blood of heaven,

in the myriad tubes of the tracheal sacs, nourished on space, that fill the centre of her body. She rises still. A region must be found unhaunted by birds, that else might profane the mystery. She rises still; and already the ill-assorted troop below are dwindling and falling asunder. The feeble, infirm, the aged, unwelcome, ill-fed, who have flown from inactive or impoverished cities—these renounce the pursuit and disappear in the void. Only a small, indefatigable cluster remain, suspended in infinite opal. She summons her wings for one final effort; and now the chosen of incomprehensible forces has reached her, has seized her, and, bounding aloft with united impetus, the ascending spiral of their intertwined flight whirls for one second in the hostile madness of love.

And all the while, throughout the telling of the story, the philosopher stands beside the poet, attentive to every least evidence of the under-currents that sway earth, that sway nature, by laws and purposes unseen, watching with sentinel eyes every movement that may chance to betray the why and the wherefore, feeling with sensitive finger-tips the screen that veils her secrets, hoping always that in this place or in that the tissue of the web, tenuous as gossamer, impervious as steel, may yield beneath his hand.

The nuptials of the Queen in the heights are

ruled by a physiological necessity in the provident economy of nature. But is this scientific truth the only aspect of truth? he asks. If we did not seek, no matter where, in uncertainties, often far greater than the one this little explanation has solved . . . if we did not seek in the mysteries of earth

something beyond the current explanation, something that should prolong it and conduct us to the beauty and grandeur that repose in the unknown, I would almost venture to assert that we should pass our existence further away from the truth than those even who, in this case, wilfully shut their eyes to all save the poetic and wholly imaginary interpretation of these marvellous nuptials.

We may not see truth, we may not find it—this one may almost take as the first and the last article of a creed which includes much else—but we fail for one reason alone. Howsoever nobly men conceive of truth, howsoever greatly men estimate its worth, "look as high as they will . . . (they can never look too high) . . . truth ever rises as they draw nearer."

And this, for Maeterlinck, is the conclusion of the matter.

X

DEATH

In the last prose work Maeterlinck has placed before his readers (which incorporates the essential pages of the essay "L'Immortalité"[1] previously published), he has shown the instinct of his art in discarding it.

Face to face with riddles of life, face to face with enigmas of nature, face to face with problems of human emotions, the philosopher had never disowned the artist, the transcendentalist had never renounced the poet. Face to face with the unsolved mystery which, so far, has lain like an iron bar across the road of experimental science, he has used words, of which he is a master, after another method. His thoughts clothe themselves in clearly outlined phrases, knitted one with another in logical sequences. Language becomes in his hands a tool, used with the carefully weighed precision of a metaphysician. With his great gift of emotional utterance, equally

[1] *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, 1907.

gifted with the touch which epitomises and visualises by a transient image the drift, sentimental or intellectual, of some side issue of thought whose direct statement would over-accentuate importance, in this last essay he seems of set purpose to deny himself, as thinker, the use of the natural endowments of his genius as artist.

Rejecting the creeds of religious beliefs, as he interprets them, the allegoric figures under whose cypher faith acknowledged the inadequacy of words to define the most silent of all mysteries, vanish from the page. The departure of the soul upon its long journey, the sleep of the soul in the death cradle of eternity, the sojourn of the soul in the eternal light, with all those familiar golden countries portrayed by Bernard of Cluny, in the centos of his "Hora Novissima," whose impassioned symbolism tells of the spirit's nostalgia for its immortal dwelling, all these and all other kindred pictorialisms of speech, where the symbol presents, if not the interior apprehension of the mind, at least the emotional sentiment associated with the mental conception, Maeterlinck has discarded. Death, we may conjecture, is a matter, in his estimation, where reason alone avails, and he has divested his diction of all that might appeal to the imagination, of all that might

lend itself to emotional effect. The lilies of the cemetery scene of *The Blue Bird* fantasy are forgotten. On the ship that sinks drowning men ask not if an artist but if a pilot is on board.

Like Montaigne, he enters the lists to combat the attitude of mind common to men with regard to life's final scene: "Je suis un enfant éperdu devant la mort," is the typical phrase quoted in his prefatory page. And primarily he seeks, in what are the first as they are the last words of the volume, to substitute for that note of troubled dismay, to substitute for the vague instinct of fear that underlies and shadows the lives even of those who hold at their heart the certificate, stamped with divine promise, of immortality, the quiet assurance of a reasonable hope.

Other secularist writers in earlier ages of less intellectualised imaginations encompassed death with ideals of courage, fortitude and dignity. The death scenes of the great epoch of Elizabethan tragedy present continually the conception of death in itself, as distinct from the evils which are its attendant circumstances, as distinct also from associated anticipations of future punishment, under aspects that preclude the possibility of terror.

'Tis less than to be born, a lasting sleep,
A quiet resting from all jealousy,
A thing we all pursue. I know besides
It is but giving over of a game
That must be lost. . . .

Ford's Calantha in "The Broken Heart" dies with the ring of bridal triumph beside the body of the beloved lover. The tortured heart of the Duchess of Malfy expires in the utter fearlessness of her unshaken dignity :—

Come, violent death,
Serve for mandragora to make me sleep !

"Dost thou lie still ?" Cleopatra asks of Iras, who has cheated her great mistress of due precedence in the death scene which keeps above all others its halo of imperial scorn :—

If thus thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world
It is not worth leave-taking.

And one and all amongst these personages of dramatic tradition, whatsoever the surroundings of horror, pain, and disaster, go to the encounter of that invisible presence—death itself—with full concurrence of the will and the equable calm befitting, in Montaigne's words, "les âmes bien nées."

Notwithstanding this ideal of courage, which, to apply Maeterlinck's doctrine of the

invisible wisdom, may be said to lie within the universal soul—*l'âme intime*—of the race (so that, to paraphrase his sentence, as we are just in the midst of our injustice we are brave in the midst of our cowardice), it remains more or less true, Maeterlinck does not overstate the fact in his opening pages, that the majority of men, in act and practice if not in theory, view death as an almost unmitigated ill, to be held at arm's length whatever suffering the postponement may entail, and to be resisted at any cost of physical distress, howsoever inevitable the eventual issue. "La mort est une pièce de la vie du monde"—and yet in all the protracted centuries of creation, life would appear never to have adapted itself to its dying, and even in the brief span of individual existence we seem to contract so inveterate a habit of living that the breaking of the habit still comes, not as the simple sequence of nature—spring, summer, autumn, winter—but as the shock of a totally abnormal catastrophe.

To alleviate and appease such terrors, terrors lurking beneath the surface of daily existence, radically to readjust men's conception of that formidable and unrehearsable ordeal, is the task Maeterlinck has here deliberately undertaken, and although he may

not be of those who can descry in the darkness of the grave the overfolding of the wings of God—"God's wings close over us and we call that darkness death"—nevertheless his tranquil appraisement of what death is not, more perhaps than his acceptation of what death may be, has a value it is difficult to overestimate. Landmarks may differ for this thinker and for that, but the wide horizons his thoughts explore before they reach the boundary lines where, for most of us, human thought as an actuality becomes undecipherable or extinct, may, if his treatise serves no other purpose, aid men's vision to penetrate distances, accustom it to soar to heights, until, from some summit, the eye, habituated to far spaces, may detect undizzied some aperture yet undiscovered and penetrate, if it be only a hair's-breadth, into the unknown.

Four centuries and more ago Montaigne, in his essay "Que philosopher est apprendre à mourir" had made his endeavour to re-educate men's minds and imaginations in respect of death. Himself the most human of philosophers, he proposed to turn his philosophy to its most human account. He would teach men to wait booted and spurred for the messenger's summons, to exercise themselves in creating as it were a natural aptitude for

the quitting of their mortal tenement, and in paragraph after paragraph he adduces his own personal experiences in the course of the mental discipline he commends.

A strain of classic stoicism pervades the desultory, discursive pages where the least mystic of thinkers proffers his counsel to his fellows. The old ideal of the contempt of death is inculcated and its attainment is to be the award of virtue. Every step of life that leads onward is beset with fever of heart for those who fear to die, for "tous les jours vont à la mort; le dernier y arrive." Fools avert their gaze from the inevitable, the wise go on their way open-eyed, alert, vigilant; for death "il y faut pourvoir." That man who is taken unaware and by surprise is taken at a disadvantage, he has not served his apprenticeship to the master. To deprive death of that vantage-ground "ostons luy l'estrangeté . . . practiquons le, accoustumons le, n'ayons rien si souvent en la tête que la mort. . . ."

Besides this hardening of the imagination, this blunting of sensation by custom, let men summon their intellectual faculties to aid in creating a new understanding of the nature of death: "La préméditation de la mort est la préméditation de la liberté." He who has learnt to die has mastered the lesson of en-

franchisement. There remains no ill in life for him who comprehends that there is no ill in the leaving of it. Life, of itself, is neither good nor ill—" ny bien, ny mal, c'est la place du bien et du mal." And death is less to be feared than nothing, " moins à craindre que rien," if there be anything less than nothing. It concerns a man neither when he is alive nor when he has ceased living. Alive, it concerns him not because of what he is, dead, because of what he is not.

With some such thread of reasoning Montaigne strove to unmask the effigy of terror that guarded in his day and generation the harvest-fields of eternal life. Maeterlinck's essay covers far wider ground.

Like Montaigne, he too deprecates the obscurity, the uncertainty of men's ideas of what should be the most perfect and luminous of conceptions :—

Une première vérité, en en attendant d'autres que l'avenir dévoilera sans doute, c'est qu'en ces questions de vie ou de mort notre imagination est demeurée bien enfantine. Presque partout ailleurs elle précède la raison ; mais ici elle s'attarde encore aux jeux des premiers âges. . . . Elle demande des choses impossibles parce qu'elles sont trop petites.

To what extent he has fulfilled his purpose of refashioning ideas moulded by tradition,

instinct and prejudice, how far, by his restatement of probabilities, his investigation of evidence concerning the survival of consciousness in the infinities of a future life, he has succeeded in reconstructing, so to say, the values of death, each individual reader will determine according to the bent of his own opinions and beliefs.

It was perhaps unavoidable that in prosecuting his enquiry Maeterlinck should pass in review the solutions to the problem of man's survival offered on the one hand by theosophists in their revival of the ancient doctrines of the reincarnation and transmigration of souls, on the other hand by the disciples of modern spiritualism in its more scientific moods of research and experiment.

Thus he examines, not without sympathy, the reaffirmations by neo-theosophy of the theory "old as man," of re-incarnation, with its suggestion of disembodied spirits reclaiming their lost shell of matter with an insistence which to the unconverted might seem displaced in souls released from the bondage of earth. And for this unseen world — a mendicant populace of wandering vagrants, whose first departure from their mortal habitation is but a first step in the long process of what may be called the dying of the dead—Maeterlinck finds no

tenable argument save that of sentiment, "le grand, le principal, et pour tout dire, le seul argument qu'ils invoquent n'est qu'un argument sentimental."

Passing hence to the arguments, the evidence adduced, and the conclusions proffered by neo-spiritism, he has devoted a large section of his essay to a review of the labours of psychical experts. What new assurance of perpetuated personality have they attained to during the thirty years more or less of recent activity in experimental investigations?

What first-hand witness do the attested apparitions, the "direct manifestations" bear to convince us that the Unknown has opened its door and that the barrier erected between life and that which lies beyond life has been surmounted? What second-hand witness do those indirect manifestations, obtained by mediumistic agencies and intervention, bring to attest the reality of existence behind the veil of death?

As recorded, and Maeterlinck in no wise denies the apparent actuality of such apparitions, the answer is still—Nothing. What answer do these, the dead whose presence they invoke, return to the recurrent question that salutes each reawakened Lazarus? None.

Ces morts d'aujourd'hui qu'ont-ils à nous dire ? . . . Ces phantasmes plus ou moins tourmentés de soucis insignifiants, bien qu'ils viennent d'un autre monde, ne nous ont jamais apporté, sur ce monde dont ils ont franchi le seuil prodigieux, une seule révélation topique. . . .

They, these dead of to-day, keep their secret no less closely than did the dead of old :—

Where wert thou, brother, those four days ? . . .
There lives no record of reply. . . .
He told it not, or something sealed
The lips of that evangelist.

Reading, indeed, the citations of attested evidence in the reports of séances and psychic experiments, a sense of vacant sadness penetrates and possesses the lay mind. The perusal of the records so patiently and hopefully preserved of scenes where the invisible spirits of those who have passed across the stage of sound to enter into the great silence are summoned to profane that silence by puerile trivialities of " message " and " communication " comes as a breach of that world-wide instinct we call reverence, comes almost as a sense of personal outrage committed in the name of those whose impotence is defence-

less. We seem in truth, in the chapters Maeterlinck has dedicated to the results of such researches, to have sunk to another region, another level of thought, to have passed from the realm of mysticism to enter the domain of a somewhat ignoble supernaturalism, to have lost from view the mystic who spiritualised matter, to find ourselves confronted by the supernaturalist—the necromancer—who materialises spirit; to have exchanged the unseen forces of the indwelling soul for the activities of external agencies. And in so doing, in this barter of the Within for the Without, we have crossed a chasm, intellectual and spiritual.

Maeterlinck suspends his judgment:—

> Il n'est pas l'heure de conclure. Ne perdons pas de vue qu'il s'agit d'une science née d'hier et qui cherche à tâtons ses outils, ses sentiers, ses méthodes et son but dans une nuit plus obscure que celle de la terre. Ce n'est pas en trente ans que se bâtit le pont le plus hardi qu'on ait entrepris de jeter sur le fleuve de la mort.

But, suspending his judgment upon the results of scientific experiment, he has demonstrated that the spirits' "impuissance à dépasser de quelques années la vie d'outre-tombe," that the limitation of time apparently

prevailing when communications with the dead are established, diminishes greatly the value and interest of experiments and revelations :—

Ce n'est, au mieux, qu'un peu de temps gagné, et nulment dans ces jeux sur le seuil que se fixe notre sort. Je passe volontiers sur ce qui m'adviendra dans le petit intervalle que ces révélations occupent, comme je passe déjà sur ce qui m'advint dans la vie ; là n'est point mon destin ni mon port.

To turn from Maeterlinck's exposition of other men's theories to the setting forth of his own.

Even here some disappointment may await the laity of thought who look in his last writings for the gentle simplicity—let it be said frankly—the same winning, human emotionalism that, in spite of some obscurities, made its direct appeal felt on every page of his earlier essays. Wandering flocks who seek not a goal but a fold may ask, "Are there not also lost shepherds upon the mountains who, wrapt in some dream of the stars, have forgotten the lowlier labours of the pasture?" and to some will come a sense of bleak effort as they climb with their guide the austere heights of metaphysical enquiry.

The enigma of which he leaves the riddle unsolved is the oldest question of humanity's

childhood, as it will be, so far as we may forecast it, the last of humanity's age. Men died, the very gods of the youth of the world died, and in the dying of the Immortals man's creed confessed death's universality. And the souls of dead men and gods peopled the Underworld. But beyond the earth-world above and the Underworld below, infinity still lies untrodden.

"Y serons nous malheureux? Qu'y deviendrons nous?" Is death the annulling of all consciousness? Is it the union, the fusion, of the individual consciousness, the individual principle of intelligence, in the universal?

> For thee, Cloud,
> Fly east or west, be made
> Snow, hail, rain, wind, grass, rose, light, shade,
> What matters it to thee? There is no "thee."

What guarantee does mortality hold for what may be its lot in the infinite?

Maeterlinck conveys his estimate of the possible, his suppositions of the probable. The intellectual and metaphysical content of his essay he has himself epitomised in the concluding chapter. Setting aside, for reasons given, the solutions proffered by religions, setting aside equally the idea of annihilation,

the three alternate hypotheses remain. The hypothesis of the survival of a disincarnated self, conscious of its own identity. The hypothesis of a self merged in the "universal consciousness." Or lastly that of a self possessed of "la conscience modifiée." Of these, which may most credibly be anticipated?

His reply is dictated by the idea he accepts of the universe, the infinity in which man lives. May man anticipate or not that, with death, "the illusion of movement and progress which we detect at the core of this life will vanish abruptly"? If so, annihilation, absorption into the universal consciousness is inevitable. If, contrariwise, death reveals that the illusion lies, not in our sense-perception, but in our reason, and that, in the world to come, there is a continued movement, a perpetual evolution, the theory of a modified and progressive consciousness is tenable. Both aspects, Maeterlinck allows, are equally unintelligible, but "s'accordent sur un point, à savoir, que la douleur sans terme et le malheur sans espérance en sont également et à jamais exclus."

Within this modified consciousness, the little earth-consciousness may survive, as theosophists and spiritists hold. If it may be allowed to speak of "vraisemblance quand

notre seule vérité est que nous ne voyons pas la vérité," this hypothesis, Maeterlinck adds, is of all hypotheses that which bears most likeness to truth. And in this idea of a triumphal progress of accumulating vitalities in a vast super-celestial eternity "tout semble permis, dans ce grand songe, hormis ce qui pourrait en arrêter l'essor." Nevertheless, even such evolution finds a term, the emigrant soul has not, it would seem, even then found a home. To open the door into a thousand successive chambers is only to have indefinitely postponed the opening of the door into unchambered space :—

Ou nous croyons que notre évolution s'arrêtera un jour ; et c'est une fin incomprehensible et une sorte de mort inconcevable ; ou nous admettons qu'elle n'aura pas de terme et dès lors, étant infinie, elle prend tous les caractères de l'infini, et doit se perdre et se confondre en lui. C'est, du reste, a quoi aboutisse la théosophie, le spiritisme, et toutes les religions où l'homme dans son bonheur suprême, est absorbé par Dieu. Et c'est encore une fin incomprehensible, mais du moins c'est la vie.

It is a life, notwithstanding, that leaves still before us the mystery of "la conscience universelle." If this exist under a form conceivable to man :

s'il y a conscience en quelque lieu ou quelque chose qui remplace la conscience nous serons dans cette conscience. Et cette conscience, ou cette chose où nous nous trouverons, ne pouvant être malheureuse, puisqu'il est impossible que l'infini n'existe que pour son malheur, nous n'y serons pas malheureux non plus. Enfin, si l'infini où nous serons lancés n'a aucune espèce de conscience ni rien qui en tienne lieu, c'est que la conscience ou ce qui la pourrait remplacer n'est pas indispensable au bonheur éternel.

So far, and no further, does Maeterlinck attempt to sound the abyss with the plummet of human reason. He makes no claim to have added to our knowledge, his endeavour has been to sift what may be truth from the vague mass of what, with appreciable certainty, may be said to be without truth. And as the conclusion to his conclusion he can but reiterate the final truth of all, can but repeat, that the universe keeps its own secret, *secula seculorum*, the vast secret in which our own small lives are so strangely implicated.

. . . . .

Thus Maeterlinck, passing from phase to phase, as poet, dramatist, essayist, has given to the world of his best.

As poet, the mournful and languid beauty of his lyrics; as dramatist, the almost unrelieved tragedy of his Love and Death dramas,

the charm and grace of his fantasies. His love of the great Elizabethans found vent in his translations of John Ford and Shakespeare. He has brought the thoughts of Novalis near to us in a poet's translation of a poet's prose; he has made accessible the rapturous meditations of the Belgian mystic.

As essayist, moral, transcendental and philosophical, he has raised the standard of the Unseen, he has given to his image of the indwelling spiritual life of man a vitality, an actuality, beside which the sensual, material body of humanity shrinks into a mere *Doppelgänger* of the soul. He has faithfully interpreted the mysteries of life human and life vegetable—the life of men, bees and flowers—according to the principle where insight is love: "l'interprétation la plus haute est toujours la plus vraie." He has championed the cause of the ideal: "Avant tout, à mesure que s'écoulent nos années gardons nous des leçons basses de l'expérience." And above all he has vindicated the supremacy of the Invisible Wisdom from which those ideals spring. Injustice may misrule the world and reason may proclaim the right of wrong, but if "notre raison a peut-être raison, ce qui a bien profondement raison . . . c'est notre idéal qui proclame qu'elle a tort. . . ."

And happily in the interpretation of the mystery of life his work is not yet ended. Meanwhile for many of us who have followed his thoughts one clear impression remains. Our eyes have followed a bird's ascending flight, and the bird's flight has carried our gaze far beyond where our eyes followed it.

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